

Exploring the Causes of Gendered Elder Care Burden in South Korea

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Abstract. This paper investigates the reasons behind gender inequality in the responsibility for elder care in the case of South Korea. Specifically, to address this general research question, three sub-questions have been proposed: whether the differences in social resources by gender, or the different responses to similar resources by gender, are responsible for heavier elder care burdens for female members in the family. In addition, to what extent did the Korean welfare policies promote gender equality in elder care? Using quantitative data from Statistics Korea (KOSIS) and OECD, along with qualitative data from preceding research conducted by Sirin Sung in 2003, the study reveals that the results support the different resource argument to a great extent, whilst the data less support the different response argument. The study also finds that the current welfare policy implemented by the Korean government had alleviated the burden of providing elder care by family, but the effect of which on gender equality was limited.

Keywords: Korea, Elderly, Nursing.

1. Introduction

From the late 1980s to the present, South Korean society has seen the rise and fall of its feminist movement, the ramifications of which are mainly tragic and counter-productive - leaving the whole Korean society even more divided by gender war politics (Kuhn, 2022), whilst the overall female status not only did not improve but also arguably more inferior (OECD 2021). The clear idea of “feminism” is, to a great extent, being despised and stigmatised in the nation (Hines and Song, 2021). A typical example of this is that of the social media attack on An San, the archery gold medalist in the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, for her having a short haircut, which was associated with feminism (Jin, 2021) - under the Korean context has connotations for being “misandrist” and “pathological”. (Hwang, 2021) After having more insights into the underlying causes of the stigmatisation of the feminist movement in Korea, I have learned that there are some underlying socio-economic issues to this: one cause was presumably the fiercer competition in the workplace after the 1997 Asian financial crisis, from which women were gradually outcompeted and disadvantaged (Aslanbeigui and Summerfield, 2000). Consequently, there was the radicalisation feminist movement that began to deviate from the original principle of promoting gender equality and enhancing female economic, political, and educational status, resorting to hate speech and even threats of violence against men, which were the contributory factors that resulted in severe stigmatisation of feminism and eventually its unsuccessful outcomes (Jung, 2022). As a result, the female status in Korea had barely risen compared to before - women are still subject to discrimination at the workplace, suggesting that most of the burden from family care fell upon them.

Therefore, with such a broad context of gender inequality in South Korea, where the heavy female family caregiving role is a major phenomenon, the research focuses on the more specific issue of female roles in elder care in this country. In the instance of Korea, the goal is to investigate the nature and causes of the burden placed on women to care for the old in the family. The general question to be examined is, "Why is there an overall heavier burden placed on women to care for the elderly?" Ostensibly, this results from the tradition of patriarchal society imposed on women throughout history. Nonetheless, there are more complex underlying social, demographic, and cultural factors to be explored. For this reason, the following sub-questions have been proposed: Is it more common for daughters to assume greater responsibility in caring for their parents (including parents-in-law) than

sons due to the differing social resources available to them? Alternatively, can male and female children have equal access to social resources, but to which different responses are exhibited? Lastly, how do welfare policies affect gender inequality in caring for the elderly?

In response to these questions, the final results have shown that the main factor contributing to gender inequality in elder care has arisen from the first argument regarding access to different resources by gender. In contrast, the second argument about different responses to the same resource by gender is supported by the results to a limited extent, though it remains to be a possible consideration for the case of Korea. Lastly, the welfare policies seem to promote gender equality to a small degree, where unpaid care time has been reduced. However, female family members still serve the dominant role in this area.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: first, review relevant literature regarding gender role in elder care in Korea, from which my contribution to fill the research gap can be discussed. Following this is the presentation of the data and results. In response, the results are analysed and discussed. At last, the limitations of this research are discussed, and suggestions for future research are proposed.

2. Literature review

2.1 Confucian cultural influence on gender role

Among East Asian welfare states, South Korea is a perfect example that is deeply characterised by the cultural inheritance of Confucianism, whose core ideals - diligence, striving for education, work ethic, entrepreneurial spirit, self-reliance virtues, and caring role of the family - contributed to its economic success with state coordination (Walker and Wong, 2005). Attempts have been made to link such Confucian nature with classifying the East Asian welfare regime, where the dominant concepts include “Oikonomic welfare states” (Jones, 1990) “Confucian welfare states” (Jones, 1993) and “Confucian welfare cluster” (Lin Ka, 1999). The overarching concept of “Confucian welfare states” proposed by Jones (1993) is concluded as follows:

“Conservative corporatism without (Western-style) worker participation; subsidiarity without the Church; solidarity without equality; laissez-faire without libertarianism: an alternative expression for all this might be ‘household economy’; welfare states – run in the style of a would-be traditional, Confucian, extended family.”

From this, it can be seen that the theoretical concept of the Confucian welfare state incorporates Confucian teachings into the contemporary liberal and conservative welfare capitalist models. The key here is the role of the family in welfare provision, which follows the Confucian ideals of *Ren* (benevolence) and *Da Tung* (commonwealth), where people in the ideal society live in harmonious relationships, secured by mutual trust and care shown for family members (Walker and Wong, 2005). In addition, the “Oikonomic welfare states” follows a “household management” style of government to run the “household economy”, accompanied by some Western-style social services (Jones, 1990). This abides by the Confucian principle of the well-run household of an ideal family, meaning that the perfect society is consisted of interconnected groups rather than isolated individuals, everyone fulfilling their respective duties and obligations just as under filial piety (following the doctrines of *Li*) according to different social orders. The ultimate goal is the upholding of stability and harmony for the collective interests of the whole society.

As the family is the core unit under the Confucian institution, this directly impacts the composition of gender roles in Korea. Sung (2003) argues that the Confucian cultural impact is comparatively more significant than alternative factors, as it presumes different roles between men and women in society and in family relations, as well as strengthening the patriarchal family structure. The Confucianism virtue dictates the obedience from woman to her husband and his family, abiding by the principles of filial piety. Such patriarchal order then implies that wives are not only obliged to serve a caring role for her parents but also for their parents-in-law, to whom financial support and

personal and practical care were provided. Despite the increasingly higher proportion of female workers entering the labour market (increased to 52 per cent by 2010) under industrialisation and the Korean government's gender equality reforms, including the establishment of the Ministry of Gender Equality in 2001 and the reform of Korean family law in 2008, these influence of Confucian traditions is still ingrained into the intergenerational family relations in South Korea. Because of this, Korean women experience coordination of the conflict between the traditional family commitment (unpaid care work) and the new gender equality ideals (participation in paid employment) (Sung 2003): the qualitative research using interviews shows that most women spent more time on unpaid family works than men, even if some also claimed that work is prioritised over unpaid care work - these are signs that women in Korea are attempting to meet both traditional and modern cultural expectations.

The main opposing view against the role of Confucian influence on East Asian social policy has been that of the inherently conservative political ideology and neo-liberal policies implemented by the authoritarian East Asian governments (Walker and Wong 2005). They argued that the interpretation of Confucianism had been made through unequal social relationships, where the ruling class with superior access to Confucian education had their own interpretation of the doctrine and thereby formulated rules that benefited their vested interests and strengthened their control of society. Similarly, Confucianism's ideas helped provide political legitimacy to the authoritarian and conservative regimes in East Asia. As a result, the restrictive and residualist social policy comes with low social expenditure and a familistic mould, especially for benefit programs like the national pension scheme; more importantly, they rather played a regulation role rather than a provision role in the welfare system. This suggested that the burden of elder care then largely fell upon women, despite the ideas of filial piety also stating the role of sons in theory.

2.2 Defamilisation typologies to measure the extent of female economic independence under the welfare state

In the 1990s, the mainstream literature on welfare state typology had been based on social class as a cause of social stratification (Esping-Andersen 1990), whose approach tended to be genderless or arguably androcentric (Sainsbury 1994). Hence, there were attempts made to put more focus on gender role, typified by the "breadwinner family model" proposed by Lewis (1992). Nevertheless, the validity of these attempts is limited by their focus on only one indicator, a small number of countries, or founded upon a qualitative concept (Esping-Andersen 1999). To make up for such shortcomings, the more quantitative method by using defamilisation typologies concerning multiple indicators and cluster analysis was developed by Bamba (2004).

The dominant definition for defamilisation is as follows: "the degree to which individual adults can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living, independently of family relationships, either through paid work or through social security provisions" (Lister, 1997). This has often led to the interpretation that considers defamilisation as the alternative functional equivalent of the more male-oriented "decommodification" for females, as it implies how welfare states reduce women's dependency on family, just as how male workforce's dependency on the market is weakened (Esping-Andersen 1999). However, the further interpretations on defamilisation are contrasting: On one hand, the focus is on how the burden of household in caring roles is relieved by state provision of care policies or services so that the reliance of care on family members is reduced (Esping- Andersen 1999). On the other hand, Bamba (2007) refuted this view by emphasising how it is more concerned with decommodifying the family as a whole rather than specifically on the degree to which welfare states promote women's autonomy and economic independence from the family. More importantly, instead of lowering the dependence on the market to sustain a living as is the case for decommodification, women need more participation in the labour market to become economically-independent workers to liberate from dependence on family life, which in essence is male economic domination (Kroger 2011).

Coming back to the aforementioned model of the "Confucian welfare regime", the analysis using defamilisation typologies on East Asian welfare states had shown that the indispensable conditions

for “internal homogeneity” and “external homogeneity” do not exist; the former represents how there are inherent similarities between these East Asian governments in organising welfare policies whilst the latter states that the organisation of welfare in the Confucian cultural cluster is inherently different from that of those not in this region (Yu and Chau, 2015). For internal homogeneity, the East Asian welfare states can be subdivided into three groups based on the extent of defamilisation, where the low is consistent with Japan and South Korea, the medium is Hong Kong and Singapore, and the high is Taiwan. In terms of female labour participation, enrollment in education, and state provision of social security for women, these East Asian welfare states are hardly similar.

Furthermore, the argument for external heterogeneity is also weakened in that there are surprising similarities as to the indicators between East Asian countries under Confucian influence and those not under such cultural influence. This evidence proves that the Confucian welfare regime theory cannot serve as the all-encompassing model for all East Asian welfare states anymore.

2.3 Research Gap

In terms of the academic debates and discussions mainly revolved around the research on “East Asian welfare states”, where an array of theories and models have already been proposed by various scholars dedicated to this area: including but not limited to the “Oikonomic welfare state” (Jones, 1990), “Confucian welfare state” (Jones, 1993), “Confucian welfare cluster” (Lin Ka, 1999) “Productivist welfare capitalism or developmental welfare state” (Holliday, 2000; Kwon, 2005), and so on. However, these typological interpretations are mainly focused on the political-economic mechanisms and cultural heritage that helped to shape the East Asian welfare regimes, which meant that scant attention had been paid to analysis from a gendered perspective, namely the focus on the female experience under the East Asian welfare states, unlike the relatively mature Western “breadwinner family model” directed towards gender role (Lewis, 1992). Despite the more recent research on the female role under East Asian welfare states, such as the gender-focused analysis on the Confucian cultural influence on the female role and defamilisation typology showing the gradual invalidating of the Confucian model, this literature takes for granted that the female burden in care is due to difference in social resources. Hence, this paper aims to extend the existing research on the female role in welfare provision by coming back to the focus on the causes of female burden in elder care, considering whether it is necessarily the difference in access to social resources that led to this situation or is there the possibility of different responses to the same resources. To avoid generalisation of broadly analysing all East Asian welfare states, this paper focuses solely on the case of South Korea.

3. Methodology and results

3.1 Quantitative data

To compare the different resources between males and females in South Korea, quantitative analysis on the grounds of various gender indicators is adopted to determine how differences in resources by gender could have resulted in the overall heavier burden of elder care on women: including labour force participation, gender pay gap, educational attainment, women in managerial position, women in politics, and leave policies. The first indicator, the female labour participation rate (with comparison relative male labour participation rate), has been chosen in that it reflects the extent to which the Korean economy promotes the employment of women, thus providing one measure of the degree of women’s economic independence from the family (Bambra, 2007). As for the gender pay gap, this indicator shows the difference between the median earnings of women relative to the median earnings of men, reflecting the discrimination and disadvantaged position confronted by women at work, resulting in higher dependence on their families (Rodgers, 2004).

For female educational attainment (in tertiary education), this affects the competitiveness of the female labour force compared to males, indicating the likeliness of women to seek highly-paid

occupations to facilitate female autonomy. (Jacobs, 1996) The composition of women in managerial position and politics show the extent of influence in both the private and public sector, which is crucial for their position and rights in society. (Cohen, 2007) Lastly, the lengths of paid leave for women, on the one hand, show whether the welfare system provides social protection to women (excluding family support) or if reliance on the family is encouraged (Bambra, 2007). On the other hand, the longer the lengths of paid leave for women, the more incentives for them to take up responsibilities at both the workplace and home.

From 2000 to 2022, the overall labour force participation rate witnessed little changes throughout the two decades, with only slight overall increase, as shown in Figure 1. Despite this, the female labour participation rate stays below that of the male during this time range: the former increased from 48.8 per cent in 2000 to below 50 per cent and increased to 54.6 per cent by 2022; the latter, in contrast, remains above 70 per cent throughout the years, with only slight decline from 2015.

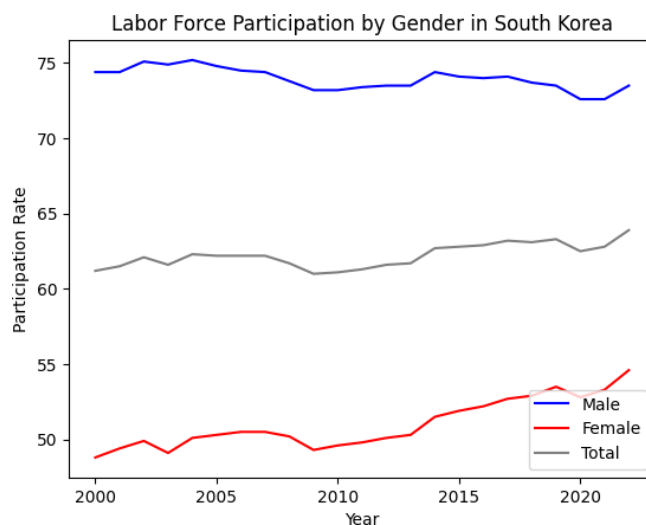


Figure 1. The male and female labour force participation rate comparison in Korea
 Source: Statistics Korea (KOSIS) Summary of economically active pop. (Seasonally adjusted)

The gender pay gap in Korea has been known to be perennially at the top of the OECD member countries since the 2000s. According to Figure 2, while the gender wage gap in both Korea and OECD total has narrowed over the years, Korea’s gap remains significantly higher than that of other OECD nations: the gap for the OECD total remains below 20 per cent whilst that for Korea was above 40 per cent in 2000 and only lowered to 31.1 per cent by 2022. There was a sudden surge in the gender pay gap to 39.6 per cent in Korea in 2010.

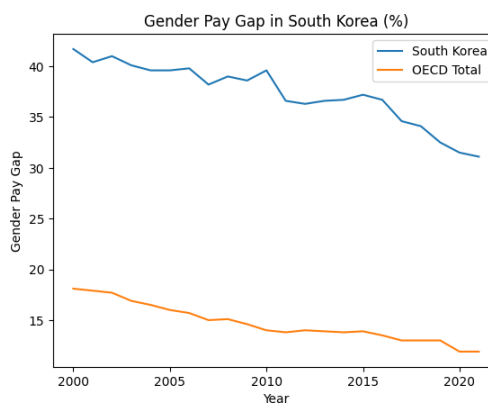


Figure 2. Gender wage gap in Korea and for OECD total Source: OECD (2023), Gender wage gap (indicator).

In Figure 3, The overall attainment rate in tertiary education in Korea has dramatically risen from 2000 to 2022, but female attainment remains below that of males. There used to be huge disparities between the two genders, where in 2000, the female attainment rate was only 17.8 per cent, and the male was 29.8 per cent. The gap gradually became smaller over the two decades, as seen in 2022, where the male rate was 53.7 per cent, and the female was 49.7 per cent.

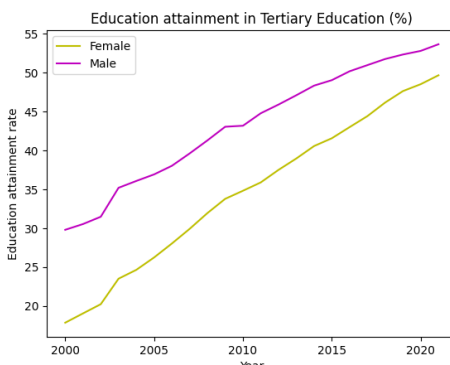


Figure 3. Education attainment rate by gender in tertiary education in Korea
Source: OECD (2023), Population with tertiary education (indicator).

From Figures 4 and 5, the composition of women in managerial and parliamentary positions in Korea is continually very insignificant compared to that of the OECD average. From 2010 to 2011, women employed in managerial positions in Korea increased almost two-fold, from 9.4 per cent to

16.3 per cent; however, the average figure for OECD countries is above 30 per cent throughout this period. In politics, the female composition is comparatively higher but witnessed little changes from 2012 to 2021. The percentage for Korea in this area is likewise lower than that of the OECD average.



Figure 4. Composition of women in managerial position in Korea and OECD average Source: OECD (2023), Share of female managers.

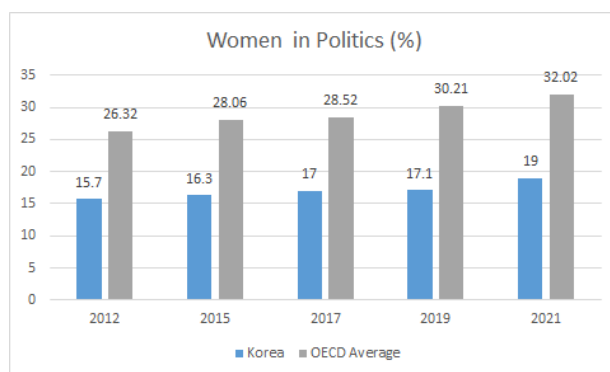


Figure 5. Composition of women in parliamentary position in Korea Source: OECD (2023), Women in politics (indicator).

The paid leave policy in Korea as a whole benefits women more than men. The length of maternity paid leave was, on average, 8.5 weeks before 2000, but this adjusted to 58.4 weeks in 2005 and 64.9 weeks in 2010, as seen in Figure 6. In comparison, there was no paid leave policy for men before 2005, but this increased to 52 weeks in 2010 and 52.6 weeks in 2012.

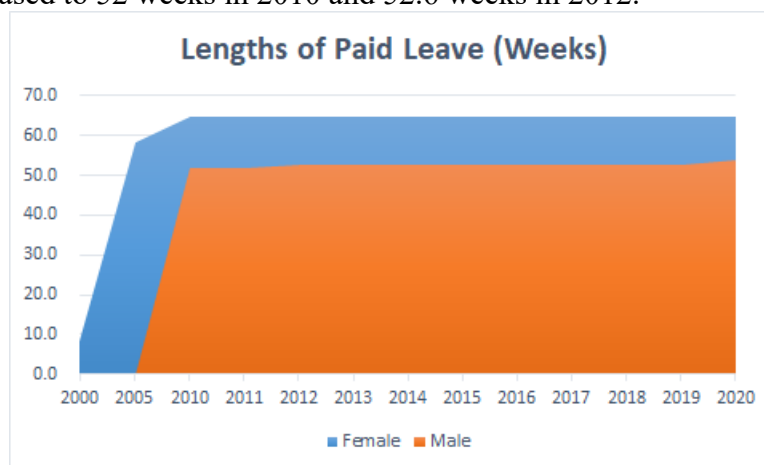


Figure 6. Total lengths of paid leave for female and male workers in Korea Source: OECD (2023)

3.2 Qualitative data

In addition to these quantitative data, qualitative data in the form of interview materials were also included into the methodology of this research. These materials derive from the a literature published by the scholar Sung (2003), wherein forty married Korean women part of the labour force and simultaneously served as caregivers for elderly (aged from 19 to 60) were interviewed in the 2000s. Such form of qualitative interview can be equally useful as they help to provide direct insights into the female daily life experiences and cultural impact thereof. In that research, the scholar asked interviewees as to whether children should shoulder the responsibility of caring for their parents or should government play more role (Sung 2003). Notwithstanding some pointed out the need for government to intervene more in this area, most respondents still expressed that children should indeed take this obligation, as a way to be role models to show to children how to respect their parents, thereby passing on the Confucian tradition of filial piety.

“I think there will be a big generation gap between my parents-in-law and me, and it will be difficult to make them understand my ideas. Then, I will be the one who has to follow their ideas, at least I have to pretend to follow it. I think it is better to live separately and see each other sometimes. To do that, government should take more responsibilities for elderly people than before.” (Chae, case 30)

“I have to spend more time for family commitment [family work] than my husband. I can say that I do most of it. Both my husband and my family-in-law, especially my mother-in-law, think that a wife has to take more responsibilities for domestic and family care than the husband, so I cannot ask my husband to help me with it.” (Ms Jeong, aged 35, in Sung, 2002)

“I think women are better in family work than men. I feel more responsible for family work than my husband by myself because men have to give more priority to paid work than family work. I know I have a Confucian traditional mind.” (Ms Son, aged 32, in Sung, 2002)

“I think children should take care of their parents and live together when parents get old, because it will be a good way to show my children how to take care of the parents. My son will do the same thing for me as I did for my parents-in-law.” (Jin, case 29)

“I agree with the idea of living with parents-in-law. It is the responsibility of children to take care of their parents, when the parents get old. I think it’s better for a son to take the responsibility for it, because it always has been that way and it is our tradition and Confucian virtue to keep.” (Yu, case 05)

To sum up, other than the response from Ms. Chae who suggested the necessity for the state to intervene more in elder care, the rest of the respondents all indicated that adult children should take up the obligation of caring for their elder parents and parent in-laws for the sake of maintaining the order of Confucian tradition, as well as the moral concern of leaving elders under the caring facilities provided by the government.

In spite of resistance from some working women in taking up the the unfair burdens of elder care, the main caring burden still fall upon them, either out of the need to conform to Korean societal expectations or their spontaneous will to help elder parents by the belief in Confucian order.

“I don’t spend much time on family work, and nor does my husband because we’ve always had housekeepers and my own mother helped me with it. For example, my mother took my son to hospital when he was ill, while I’m working in the workplace. I could and still can only concentrate on paid work. I think if women are not in a position to concentrate on their paid work, it will be better for them and society that they stay at home and take care of their family. I agree with the idea that women are more responsible for family work than men in the family. It used to be like that, and I think that it is our good tradition that our society should maintain.” (Ms Ha, aged 52, in Sung, 2002)

“I don’t need to spend much time on family commitments [family work] because I have housekeepers and they manage everything for me in the family I agree with the idea that men need to concentrate on paid work and women need to do more things for their family than their husband in the family.” (Ms Yun, aged 58, in Sung, 2002)

Here, there seemed to be more gender equality in the role of elder care between sons and daughters; but in practice, there is ambivalence in the actual actions of these working women, in that they had to coordinate between paid work and unpaid family work. They asserted that family works do not occupy a huge portion of their time, and therefore do not affect their concentration on paid work.

However, they actually relied partially on hired housekeepers to relieve some burden of care work. They indeed have their own pursuit for career; but still, they emphasise the need for women to shoulder caring role and admit the need for men to focus more on paid jobs.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Are parents more likely to receive care from daughters than sons because they have access to different social resources?

On the grounds of the results as previously mentioned, the unequal access to social resources due to gender difference as a cause of heavier role for Korean working women in elder is testified to a large extent. Such phenomenon can be explained by vertical occupational segregation, whereby the male are in the better-paid position and have` higher status than female. Job segregation in nature is arisen from the difference in demographic characteristics by gender (Jarman, 2012). For educational attainment, the rate for female workforce is overall lower, especially that of tertiary education, than their male counterparts. This then contributes to unequal job opportunities and wider gender wage gap (Blackburn, 2006). Such economic inequality rests in the situation where women are more likely to become the primary caregivers for elder parents and parents in-law than men. Specifically, lower levels of education can limit women's access to higher-paying jobs, which can make it more difficult for them to afford formal elder care services or hire private caregivers (Jacobs, 1996). This can result in a heavier burden of care falling on family members, especially women, who may have to reduce their work hours or quit their jobs altogether to provide care for their elderly family members. On the other hand, the parents feel there is high opportunity cost for daughters to take up paid jobs than sons because of income inequality. They may feel it is more worthy for female children to take up family works and let male children to contribute in paid work instead.

Furthermore, the gender wage gap in Korea exacerbates the economic inequality between men and women (Cohen, 2007). This will further limit women's ability to afford formal elder care services, which can be prohibitively expensive, or to hire private caregivers. Moreover, women in Korea face

a "glass ceiling" in the workplace, with limited opportunities for career prospect compared to men (Jung, 2019). This can lead to lower levels of job satisfaction and a greater likelihood of leaving the workforce altogether to provide care for elderly family members.

4.2 Given that female and male children have the access to the same resources, to which they have different responses?

In contrast, the interpretation that regards different responses to the same social resources by gender as a cause for elder care burden on female in Korea is supported by the results to a limited extent - the only sign of this is seen from the unemployment rate by gender at all levels of education, wherein the female rate is unexpectedly equal or even lower than that of male. Several factors might help to explain this condition. Primarily, it is due to the norms dictated by Confucian cultural heritage, as can be seen from the qualitative data above, where societal norms and cultural traditions expect them to abide by filial piety (to both parents and parents in-law), and show obedience to male dominance, despite the fact that there has been increasingly more participation of female in labour force (Sung 2003). Also significant is the influence of Confucianism on the ruling-class - on the welfare policies regarding facilitation of gender equality. The Confucian welfare state is in itself characterised by minimal state expenditure on all care facilities and related welfare benefits, including elder care (Goodman and Peng, 1996). The resultant system thereby encourages dependency on family, especially women, to provide care for elderly, rather than by the state or the market. Moreover, the state plays more of a coordinating role in organising welfare rather than the provision role. Finally, the low disparities in unemployment rate by gender can also be explained by women's low attachment to the labour market, that is to say, a great majority of them are employed in part-time jobs with fragmented careers when compared with the full-time jobs more common among men. This increases the likelihood of them to depend on family life instead of on labour market, suggesting that they are more likely to become the natural caregivers for elderly in the family.

Unemployment rate at all levels of education by gender (aged from 25 to 64 years old/%)			
	2000	2011	2021
Women	2.8	2.7	3.4
Men	4.5	3.3	3.3

Figure 7. Unemployment rate by gender at primary, secondary, and tertiary education levels Source: OECD (2023), Educational attainment and labour-force status. https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?datasetcode=EAG_NEAC#

4.3 To what extent do welfare policies promote gender equality in the role of elder care?

Prior to the 1990s, the matter of care was mainly dependent on family provision, rather than being an integral part of the Korean social policy. This pattern corresponds with the Confucian welfare system, where limited government spending on care policies is justified by the Confucian teachings. Only the recent 1997 economic crisis and demographic changes, including increasingly lower fertility rate and aging of population, have paved way for policy reforms that intend to promote for expansion in welfare and more gender equality. The most significant policy implemented was the Long-Term Care Insurance (LTCI) in July 2008. The aims were to establish a system that responds to Korean public concerns about aging to ensure citizens will receive care and supported by society a whole; on other hand, to also relieve the burden of care on family by providing public care service (Baek 2011). Its funding sourced from subsidies paid by central government (25%), premium contribution by employees (62%) and user fees (13%).

However, to extent to which the social security system socialise the costs and burden of elder care remains questionable. There were indeed reduction in unpaid care time by 2010 from 87% to 72%. The unpaid care time by spouses and female relatives were reduced by LTCI financing, which transferred the care burden from family to state and market to some extent (Yoon, 2013). However, the gender inequality of family burden in elder care is promoted to a small extent. The female relatives still spend more time on unpaid elder than male. Moreover, the overall coverage remains limited - only to 4.9% of the client population. Theoretically, the coverage should be universal; in reality, those with disabilities could not really receive long-term care as the government prioritised aging (Baek 2011). Another problem is that the elder care facilities are mostly provided but the private sector, whose costs are unaffordable for many families.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research project explored as to the nature and causes of gender inequality in elder care role for the case of South Korea. The quantitative data consisted of gender equality indicators support the first sub-question - the different resource argument as a cause - to a large extent. Possible explanations for this interpretation include vertical job segregation and the phenomenon of “glass-ceiling” for female at the workplace. In comparison, the second sub- question, which argued that male and female workforce have different to the same resources, are supported by the results to a small extent. It is a possible consideration for the gender issue in elder care, but this circumstance remains uncommon for the Korean society. Despite this, several arguments help to explain this potential condition: the Confucian cultural influence on both family’s gender relations and the state’s welfare regime; the low attachment of female workers to the labour market. Finally, for the third sub-question in regards to the effectiveness of Korean welfare policies promote gender equality in elder care burden, most literature shows that the effect is very limited, with some reduction in unpaid care time but female family members still play the dominant role in the informal care work for elderly.

6. Limitations

This piece of research is bounded by several limitations. The most palpable one is of insufficient relevant statistical knowledge for research. The analysis adapted is based off of very basic and evident approach to quantitative data, meaning that the significance of the data can hardly be tested. In addition, there is still lack of considerations for other factors. The factors within consideration in this paper are founded upon socio-economic, cultural, and political factors, which imply that influence from other factors can also be considered, including technology and media. Furthermore, the second sub-question is weakly supported by the data, supported only to some extent by the quantitative and qualitative data. As a result, the explanations for this uncommon circumstance is based on surmises and assumptions. Last but not least, the timeliness of the theories are also dubious. The references to literature mainly dat back to the 1990s and in the 2000s, and barely any in 2010s. Such obsolescence of the theories can result in them not necessarily match with the newest data in the recent years. This is especially critical considering that events like Covid-19 may have bring about other changes not discussed in this paper.

7. Future suggestions

The directions for research in this area are extensive. On one hand, the case studies can be expanded to other welfare states in the Confucian cultural cluster in the East Asian geographical region, other than South Korea in this paper, including Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong SAR, and potentially China. On the other hand, outside the East Asian cluster, comparisons can by made with other welfare clusters, mainly that of European in the West. Lastly, alternative factors affecting gender inequality in elder care can be explored, apart from those discussed in this dissertation.

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