

## On the status of Korean Unemployed Female Youth and the Policy Plan

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— *Review of* —  
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### ABSTRACT

The study will attempt to identify the causes of Korean youth unemployment based on existing studies, and explore the causes of female youth unemployment and possible solutions to the problem. First, the status and causes of female youth unemployment will be reviewed with causes of youth unemployment, which has become a hot issue in society. While most previous studies have addressed the causes of female youth unemployment in individualistic and structural perspectives, this study will review the issues in a social network perspective. In addition, the study will suggest the policy plan to resolve the causes in terms of individuals, universities, and government. In order to improve the problems identified from the study, it is expected that joint efforts from individuals, universities, and government will enhance the current situation of female youth employment.

Keywords: Unemployment, the female youth, youth unemployment

### I . Introduction

The issues of reducing unemployment and raising the employment rate, which continues to be a hot agenda topic in Korean labor markets, typically are brought up about two groups, youths and females. For youths, the unemployment rate has been the core of the problem since the beginning of the unemployment crisis. However, due to an increase of youths in the youth NEET(Not in Education, Employment, or Training) group and the kangaroo group, youths who are not learning any new trades or skills and have no intentions to get a job, the unemployment crisis is intensifying and emerging as a much more serious problem. It is much more difficult to get them to stand independently than to give those jobs.

The entry barriers especially, are much higher in labor markets for female youths than male youths. Head of the Research Department for Equality & HRD Policies, Korea Women's Development Institute pointed out that female students still cannot avoid unfavorable results in employment even though they participate more actively in employment preparation activities and programs than male students. Actually, females are bound to experience more difficulties in real employment situations than

males, even if they have equal education backgrounds. Because various gender discriminatory practices act as obstacles in the recruitment process, it is not easy for women to enter the job market (Park, 2006). Korea's employment rate among women holding a BA (Bachelor of Art) degree or higher, is the lowest among OECD countries. It is shown that 34.1% of women with a BA degree or higher are unemployed, but don't engage in job-seeking activities at all (Hyundai Economic Research Institute, 2014).

In this regard, it is predicted that it will become more difficult for the female youth to enter the labor market. Most of the studies on women's employment point out that a significant portion of problems, such as low employment rates and low economic participation, instability of employment, low wages and poverty, and poor quality of employment like polarization in job quality are due to marriage, and childbirth, etc. (Kim, Yan & Bae, 2013). As such, the issues of female youth employment have attracted relatively less attention until now.

Therefore, this study investigated the unemployment status of female youths in the beginning stages of entering the labor market. Furthermore, the study will explore ways to help them overcome the employment crisis and activate their employment. To this end, the status and unemployment causes were identified through the review of the associated literatures. In addition, while the definition of 'youth' may differ between scholars and academic backgrounds, this study defines youths as the population aged from 15-29 years old, which is the definition of a youth defined by the Special Act on Youth Employment Promotion. Furthermore, the term 'the unemployed' can be said to refer to any state in which no economic activity is performed, as 'the state of not being employed'; which includes unemployment and a state of no economic activity (ILO, 1982).

## **II. Review of Existing Studies**

### **1. Composition of the unemployed youth**

The unemployed youth can be classified into: ① the unemployed who are currently engaging in job-seeking activities and can be immediately employed when a proper job appears; ② those who are not engaging in any job-seeking activity, but have intentions to get a job and are doing some preparations for employment; ③ and those who have no intention to get a job and are not engaging in any job-seeking activity. The ways to resolve problems of unemployed youths should be differentiated between groups (Shin, Min & Kwon, 2013). This study classified the unemployed

female youth into three groups.

Table1. *Composition of the unemployed youth*

The unemployed	Those who are currently engaging in job-seeking activities and can be immediately employed when a proper job appears
Those in preparation for employment among a population with low economic activity	Those who are not engaging in any job-seeking activity, but whose main activities are in preparations for employment
Those who have no intention to get a job and are among a population with low economic activity	Those who are not engaging in any job-seeking activity or preparation for employment

The first group includes unemployed youths and a group in need of jobs. For them, policies such as job creation, job placement, etc. are required; providing or acting as an agent for "good jobs" will be more desirable.

The second group, as a part of the youth population with low economic activity, does not desire immediate employment, but has intentions to get a job and whose main activity is preparing for employment. For them, it is necessary to provide jobs or more effective supports for employment preparations than acting as agents.

Finally, the group that does not belong to either of the above two groups, that is, youths who are not engaging in any job-seeking activity or preparing for employment, consist of a considerably heterogeneous subgroups. The sub-group, which accounts for the largest share in this group, are students who are attending regular or normal educational institutions. While some students, including the soon-to-be graduates, are preparing for employment in combination with studies, they are not entirely immersed in employment preparations; finishing course work is more important for these students than preparing for employment, so they are not classified separately.

## 2. Economic activities of the female youth

In terms of university graduates, gaps in higher education between males and females are slim; the gap in the initial entrance into the labor market between males and females have been rapidly shrinking, as well. The youth employment rate has been much higher in males, but reversed in 2005 and has been higher in females since

then (Kang, 2014).

Looking at the economic activities of female youths (15-29 years old) in 2014, the number employed was approximately 2.02 million persons; the unemployed was approximately 168 thousand; those with no economic activity were 2.56 million; the rate of participation in economic activities is 46%. The rate of participation in economic activities is shown to be higher in female youths than male youths as of 2014. The number of people employed is more in female as well, and number of the unemployed is less in female. The rate of participation in economic activities has been higher in male than female until 2004. However, it can be seen that the rate of participation in economic activities has been higher in female since 2005.

Table 2. *Economic activities of 15-29 years old male and female youths*

Unit: 1,000 person, %

Year	Man				Women			
	Employed	Unemployed	Economic Activity	EA Participation Rate	Employed	Unemployed	Economic Activity	EA Participation Rate
2004	2,203	235	2,445	49.9	2,375	177	2,706	48.5
2005	2,108	215	2,459	48.6	2,341	172	2,625	48.9
2006	2,023	202	2,546	46.6	2,247	162	2,663	47.5
2007	1,993	200	2,611	45.7	2,209	127	2,714	46.3
2008	1,926	182	2,695	43.9	2,158	133	2,729	45.6
2009	1,873	204	2,722	43.3	2,084	144	2,754	44.7
2010	1,845	190	2,738	42.6	2,069	149	2,713	45.0
2011	1,831	181	2,707	42.6	2,048	139	2,683	44.9
2012	1,820	171	2,716	42.3	2,023	142	2,645	45.0
2013	1,813	182	2,759	42.2	1,980	149	2,665	44.4
2014	1,846	217	2,679	43.5	2,023	168	2,569	46.0

Data: 2014 Economically Active Population Survey Data of the Korea Statistical Information Service (KOSIS)

### 3. Causes of Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment exerts a variety of negative impacts not only on the individuals facing the unemployment, but also the entire society. Youth unemployment encountered at the beginning stage of the labor market causes unemployed youths to experience a decrease in self-confidence and an increase in frustration. This in turn could cause a decrease of on the job learning opportunities

and damage the production potential of the individuals. In general, people are more adaptive and can easily digest training at a younger age, and behavioral patterns that formed at a younger age tend to last for a lifetime. So, initial unemployment can have a negative impact on long-term employment prospects of individuals (O'Higgins, 2001). Therefore, this study will attempt to identify causes of overall youth unemployment first before examining the causes of female youth unemployment, specifically.

The causes of youth unemployment mentioned in existing studies are classified into the following categories: falling economic growth rate, degradation in job creation capacity of the economy and lack of decent jobs; over-education pursuant to the education inflation; preference of non-regular workers and experienced workers due to uncertainties about the quality of the workers; problems with recruiting and job-seeking process, mismatching, etc.

### 3.1 Demand Factors

The existing studies addressing the demand side of labor for the causes of unemployment claimed that reduction in job creation capacities of companies and lack of decent jobs, due to the slowdown in the economic growth rate of the nation compared to the past high growth period, have caused youth unemployment (Lee, 2004; Kim, 2008). Decrease in labor demand causes the reduction of employment in youths, as well as in the elderly. On the other hand, the youth unemployment rate is affected more sensitively by the variation in overall demand than the elderly unemployment rate. The youth unemployment rate especially, is more sensitively affected in economic downturn than the elderly unemployment rate (Raffe, 1985). It is because companies minimize layoffs and reduce new recruitments of young university graduates in the direction of preferential treatment of the vested labor rights when restructuring is needed due to the deterioration of an economic situation. In addition, they point out that many of the jobs the youths desire are continuously decreasing. From his review on the trends of the number of employees in major large enterprises (ranked within 30th in size), public companies, and financial companies, in which the highly-educated youth wish to be employed, Jeong (2004) observed constant decreasing trends and pointed out the phenomenon was caused because of youth unemployment. It is the reality that many younger people are striving to get a desired job even though it may be two or three time more challenging in order to be employed in the so-called 'divine job'

### 3.2 Supply Factors

The existing studies that analyzed the causes of youth unemployment in terms of labor supply point out that massive production of the highly-educated youth after the 1990s results in excess supply of highly-educated laborers compared to the demand, eventually leading to them to be unemployed (Kim, 2005; Lee, et al. 2005; Weon, 2005; Park, et al. 2005; Kim, 2008). As these youths supply the labor market, more jobs are required to employ them. So, if other conditions are constant, as the rate of highly educated youths increase, the more youth unemployment will increase (O'Higgins, 2001). Actually, Korenman and Neumark (1997) conducted the associated analysis on 15 OECD countries and elucidated that a 10% increase in the youth population generates 5% of the corresponding increase in the youth unemployment rate. With this increase in the supply, the relative wage level has shown continuous decreasing trends, which implies that the highly-educated youth laborers have been relatively in excess supply compared to the demand of highly-educated youth laborers.

### 3.3 Changes in Hiring Patterns of Companies

Some studies address the causes of youth unemployment in terms of changes in hiring patterns of companies. The preferred form of employment on the part of companies has been on the changing trend from regular (permanent) employment to non-regular (temporary) employment. Yoon (2004) pointed out non-regular employment practices are the cause of increased unemployment rates.

Women account for a higher portion in non-regular workers; the wage gap between regular employment and non-regular employment is huge and non-regular employment is concentrated within specific jobs (Lee, 2004).

As non-regular employment is becoming common, transitions from non-regular employment into regular employment is becoming more and more difficult. So, the labor environments are expected to be further deteriorated in the future for women. In addition, non-regular workers are increasing within the youth population, which will eventually reduce employment duration. On the other hand, the experienced workers tend to be preferred to new employee due to the companies' uncertainty about the quality of work that could be performed. It caused unfavorable states, in terms of labor market experiences, for the unemployed youths. Some studies performed an empirical analysis on the changes in employment structures, showing the preference of the experienced workers to new job-seekers in youth labor markets (Lee, 2003; Kim, 2004).

### 3.4 Job matching (mismatching)

Finally, job mismatching, which has been raised as the most convincing cause, will be addressed. The phenomenon can be grasped from the following two aspects; the first aspect explains that, due to the drastic advancement of technological knowledge, school education contents do not well reflect the level of technology required within the industries, causing youth unemployment to increase (Levin, 1983). Due to the gap in the required technological knowledge between schools and companies, companies prefer experienced workers who can be deployed immediately onto jobs, leading youths to unemployment. The explanation is connected to the argument emphasizing the smooth transition from school to the job. Secondly, educational level improvements, especially the increased ratio of university graduates could be a cause generating the mismatch between desired jobs by university graduates and jobs provided by the industries. That is, escalation in the expected job level due to education escalation causes a lack of demand in good jobs with better working conditions, and a lack of supply in bad job with worse working conditions. Some companies have experienced these difficulties with recruiting while the unemployment were increasing (Choi, 2003). In addition, when individual youths do gain employment through a job search but are mismatched in the process, unemployment could become a problem. When examining the mismatch phenomenon in unemployed youths through the relationship between the determinants of expected job level and reserved wage, Oh (2012) stated that the higher the reserved wage, the higher the expected job level; and males are higher in reserved wage than females, but females are higher in expected job level than males.

### 4. Causes of Female Youth Unemployment

Desires for social participation and employment have been growing with the increasing educational opportunities and changes in awareness in female university graduates, but a lot of obstacles are observed in accepting their employment needs. Obtaining jobs in of in it's self is very challenging for most young women; they are in a state of downward employment, accepting positions that are below their capacity, potential, and education level. It is a real-world situation of highly-educated female employees suffering from discriminatory employment practices, in terms of deployment & training, promotion & upgrading, wage, retirement, etc. even after passing the hiring gate under equal conditions as their male counterparts (Koo & Hong, 2003)

The causes of female youth unemployment in Korea can be addressed from a variety of viewpoint, which will be outlined in the following 3 point of view. First, the individualistic perspective seen by a lack of effort on the part of the woman herself as the cause; second, the structural perspective seen by the discriminatory structure against women in labor markets; finally, the perspective seen within social capital (networks). Most of the initial studies on the low employment rate of female university graduates have focused on the individualistic and structural standpoint (Lee, 1994; Jeong, 1995; Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Barron & Norris, 1976; Althausen & Kalleberg, 1981). However, there have recently been emerging studies addressing causes of female youth unemployment within a social network perspective, affecting the acquisition of job information and employment results, as well as simple individualistic and structural aspects.

Table 3. *Obstacle factors in employment of highly-educated women*

Classification	Sub Factors	Contents
Individual perspective	Academic performance in university, general capabilities, professional skills	Problems inherent in the female student herself of not investing for employment during university
Structural perspective	Men-women ratio, men-women discrimination	Structured gender discrimination problems within labor markets
Social networks	Quality of information, reliability of information, influential power, employment support systems	Information for successful employment, employment support systems, influential power of human networks

#### 4.1 Individual Perspective

The individual viewpoint representing the human capital theory claims that female university graduates are less competitive than male university graduates in the labor market where interactions occur between employers due to lack of qualities, capabilities, occupational spirits, preparations for employment, etc. Therefore, it is assumed that employers are not willing to hire women on the basis of judgment that productivity will be lower in women than in men. Koo, et al. (2003) stated that female students tend to start career determination later in life with insufficient preparations for employment; companies very effectively evade hiring women by utilizing these



problems of lower employment spirits.

Prior studies stated that female students have strong desires for employment, but are lacking in firm occupational spirits (Yoo, 1995); female students are more dependent upon school educational plans in career preparation actions than their independent plan (Kim, 2003). Recent studies revealed that students of specialized colleges have a will to obtain jobs for economic stability rather than psychological aspects like self-fulfillment or building human networks. However, they also tend to have a strong preference for service jobs and educational jobs are late in starting employment preparation, lack of information in career path, and are less active in career preparation (Ahn, 2006; Lee & Lee, 2012).

#### 4.2 Structural Perspective

Structural perspectives assume that labor markets are not homogeneous as assumed in the human capital theory, but consist of the segmented and heterogeneous submarkets. That is, labor markets consist of diverse dimensions (axis) having distinctive characteristics such as gender, race, species, education level, and so can provide distinctive opportunities for every different group. Even though women should have equal rights as men, they are bound not only to experience difficulties in job searches, but also to be limited in employment sectors due to the attributed characteristics that women have in nature. Therefore, the structural causes in labor markets can connect micro properties on the level of individuals to macro properties of social structure; individual-society integration can help explain the reason that women are exposed to discrimination in labor markets even when having equal human capital as men (Kim, 1999).

Basically, there are structural constraints preventing the entry of women graduates and discriminatory employment practices originated from deep-rooted patriarchal gender cultures in Korean labor markets. The reason that women are unequally positioned in labor markets can also be explained by the labor market structure showing segmentation by gender. According to their explanations, women are unfavorably positioned in the labor market entry itself, and are likely to be employed by unstable firms run with small capital, in firms with poor working conditions, and fewer opportunities for promotion, or in the firms without labor unions or inactive labor unions (Park, 2004). Along with changes in socio-economic environments, traditional patriarchal values are another causes still negatively affecting the social advancement of women. The settings for highly educated women are still insufficient in terms of government measures and social attentions. Due to

patriarchal reasoning, women engaged in jobs are not free from double burdens of job responsibilities and home responsibilities in their families, unlike men. Women have been experiencing breaks in career due to life events such as marriage, childbirth, and child care, as well as taking the role of producers through economic activities and the responsibility of house work. Actually, child care is the most important cause of employment interruption and often acts as an obstacle when trying to re-enter the labor market (Kwon, et al. 2010; Kim, 2002; Kim, 2010).

#### 4.3 Social Network Perspectives

As Finneran and Kelly (2003) stated that half of all the vacancies are filled through networks, and that all information is not delivered equally to every person. As Dzubow (1985) mentioned, in real world labor markets a considerable size of hidden job markets needing a workforce exists even though they are not formally disclosed. Ahn(2006) stated that certain jobs are not substantially different from those that do not exist for the job seekers who are trying to obtain job information relying only on formal methods; Jang, et al. (1999) noted quality of information, reliability of information, influential power, job search, and employment ways in accordance with the flow, and so on, are all prerequisites for a successful job search. The core of networks is to secure information on jobs and labor markets. Kim & Park (2014) stated that women need to build robust networks between agencies for effective transitions to the job world, and networks between individuals play a great role in Korea, lacking in institutional arrangements. However, women are weak in building networks, and are at a disadvantaged position to transition to labor markets. Social networks are the capital, which is intrinsically present in the relationship between individuals and the relationship between institutions. Individual job-seekers can extract this capital by participating within networks of others or in institutions in order for a smooth transition to the world of jobs (Kim, & Park, 2014).

#### IV. Suggesting policy Plan

Many labor experts emphasize non-discriminative utilization of highly educated female workforces, in terms of efficiently utilizing human resources and securing the mid-to-long-term competitiveness of the nation. Accordingly, the government, female societies, and academic societies have proposed some programs, but they are insufficient. Korean societies have not yet been able to present realistic measures to resolve the problem of female youth unemployment. Therefore, this study hopes to propose policy plan to help resolve female youth unemployment by segmenting into

the individual level, university level, and government level.

### 1. Individual level

The youth should think carefully about the careers and jobs they want, collecting detailed information about various career worlds, while having sufficient time to explore them rather than simply studying for unconditional university entrance exams and following trends valuing the higher education. This time spent will enable them to be prepared to overcome the realistic problems and challenges they may face in the labor market after university graduation. Women have shown rather less active attitudes in the process of employment preparation activities and adaptation to labor markets. In addition, in social environments where prejudice and stereotypes against women workers still remain, above all, women themselves should take more positive and proactive steps towards entering the labor markets by establishing professionalism and setting goals to enhance their attitudes.

According to the study of Cho (2013), it was identified as a fact that any employment preparation activity or specification buildup would not contribute to enhancing the performance in labor market. Actually, female students are more concentrated in building a variety of specifications for employment preparation activities than male students. However, it is necessary to identify the qualifications required in their desired career path in advance and to systematically prepare themselves for it rather than to focus on reckless specification buildups. The effects of these efforts can be more easily identified in the individual level efforts when career-related education is reflected in the actual school curricula.

### 2. University level

Linking universities and businesses enables field-centric vocational training to be realized and the opportunities for training to be expanded naturally, thereby leading to expected positive effects. In addition universities can take the role when companies want to get their employees to be re-educated. Through this university-business linkage, each university can create a specialized strategy to train a standing army of those wanting to enter the labor market through specific training skills that can be actually utilized within the field. Actively utilizing job-training courses belonging to the curriculum can be considered. Rather than formal practice courses for simply acquiring credits, such efforts as developing a unified course of practice and employment are required. Career guidance for students should be designed in a personalized way depending on the grade and major. Female students in enrollment

showed less active attitude towards the preparation course for transition to labor markets than male students (Whang, 2012). In consideration of these characteristics, establishing a specialized program for female students or installing an employment task force for female students can be considered. Female-specialized career training programs, etc. that have already been conducted at many universities give female student enhanced self-confidence in job-seeking and support them to be able to proceed with an active campus life.

In addition, each university should strive to change consciousness on gender equality within the faculty and staff of the university to eliminate a gender discriminatory culture. Male-centric practices, like recommending male students to the company's employment referral make a commitment of female students to employment meaningless and can sometimes increase their frustration (Cho, 2013).

### 3. Government level

Presenting suggestions for the unemployed youth on the government level may be necessary to cultivate jobs in industries that can elevate employment elasticity. Since high-wage jobs at large enterprises preferred by the youth are limited, it is necessary to implement the policies that can foster SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) and induce the youth to SMEs. Without improvements in management environments and working conditions, it would be difficult to induce the youth to SMEs. Therefore, the government should prepare comprehensive supportive measures to induce the youth to SMEs. In addition, effective policy plan for the female workforce should be created with active measures for the prevention of gender discrimination against female youths. If the discriminatory hiring practices related to gender and education level, and the problem of discrimination of non-regular (temporary) workers are not solved at the company level, a way to impose the administrative sanctions through continuous monitoring should be considered. Conversely, it could be also considered to provide incentives of financial supports to exemplary companies showing examples of non-discrimination in female employment and promotion. In addition, as a measure to balance work and family, the maternity care system, which supports the women preparing for childbirth and those in need of childcare, should be actively implemented. On the other hand, if companies are not willing to employ females or less-skilled workers, public sectors should prepare and provide a good quality of jobs to actively lead the realization of gender equality. In regard to employment support policies especially, specialized programs, such as customized employment supports considering life cycle of women, re-employment

training for unemployed women, and vocational training for female workers should be considered. These programs could expect a higher satisfaction rate than other ordinary employment support programs (Cho, 2013).

## V. Summary and Conclusion

Labor environments have been gradually improving, but the number of unemployed youths who will be responsible for the future of the nation has been increasing each year. The degree of severity in unemployment that is sensed by the youth is also becoming more serious. It should be addressed in terms as a national problem since it is now far beyond an individual problem. Therefore, this study examined the status of unemployed female youths, and analyzed the causes of unemployment among female youths in an individual perspective, structural perspective, and social network perspective. The authors of this study then reviewed the ways to help them overcome/resolve the employment crisis and searched for ways to activate employment on the individual, university, and government levels. After all, in order to overcome the unemployment of female youths, individuals, universities and government should strive for solutions in a unified and collaborative way. First, high aspirations for employment and aggressive/proactive employment activities/attitudes for entering labor markets are required on the part of each female student herself. Universities should strive to develop field-oriented training programs in order to foster a good quality of female workforces required in companies. In addition, establishing a specialized program for female students, or installing an employment task force for female students should be considered on the part of the female student. Finally, the government should review ways to prepare effective policies for the female workforce through the active measures, which can prevent the discrimination linked with gender or education.

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