

Abstract of Doctoral Dissertation

**Anxieties and Difficulties of Low-Income Senior Citizens
Living in South Korean Metropolises: Perspectives on
Instability in Employment and Housing**

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In recent years, poverty among elderly persons has become a major issue in Korean society; it has been suggested that this problem is due to the short history of low-level income security for elderly persons as well as the weakening of familial support. However, the present study revealed that in addition to these issues, the underlying cause is unstable employment before old age. Most low-income seniors in Korea lost the opportunity to attend school due to the conditions during the colonial period and poor home environments. They had to work during their teenage years in order to survive. Due to illiteracy and low levels of education, they were forced to work unstable jobs as live-in housekeepers, peddlers, street vendors, and day laborers. Moreover, as a consequence of the delay in the development of various social security systems, they continued working low-wage jobs throughout their lives. Thus, they entered old age without any prospects of making a living. Fluctuations in Korean society and economy associated with the prioritization of economic policy allowed the unstable working conditions of low-income persons to continue and further increased housing instability.

The first aim of this study is to reveal the anxieties and difficulties faced by senior citizens with low incomes in the rapidly changing socio-economic situation of South Korea. The second aim is to elucidate factors that form the background of the past and present living conditions of current low-income senior citizens, namely, the circumstances of uncertain employment and housing and the relationship between them. The third aim is to ascertain the effects of the problems of uncertain employment and housing on the process of poverty creation among low-income senior citizens and its resulting association with current lifestyles.

The results of the study first of all revealed that low-income senior citizens face uncertainty in employment and housing throughout their lifetimes. It was also shown that social and economic

changes had an impact on the hardships in their lives. Furthermore, a chain of poverty-related events, such as family disintegration and disruption, was observed. For senior citizens receiving public assistance, the fact is that expenses like utility costs and housing costs far exceed such benefits, compelling them to remain in their present dire condition. Moreover, life continues to be difficult for senior citizens who do not receive public assistance despite being below the minimum living income standards. They rely on small remunerations from elderly employment support businesses or meager incomes from waste paper collection. In addition, the anxieties of low-income senior citizens are exacerbated by circumstances such as constant apprehension about the prospect of their public assistance pension being canceled, or the recent dramatic change in renting practices.