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Do Public Employment Programs in Korea Facilitate Occupational Matching for Older Adults?

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Abstract

As South Korea undergoes rapid demographic aging, it also faces the highest poverty rate among older adults across OECD nations. In response, a growing number of older adults remain in the workforce after retirement. However, they are frequently concentrated in precarious, low-paying positions that do not utilize their previous skills or experience. In light of this, recent policy initiatives have aimed to better connect post-retirement employment with individuals' former careers. This study assesses whether public employment programs facilitate reemployment in occupations aligned with older workers' lifelong professional paths. Drawing on the 2024 Economically Active Population Survey (N = 3,123), logistic regression analyses yield three key findings. First, individuals re-employed through public programs are significantly less likely to secure career-related positions compared to those in the private sector. Second, gender differences remain pronounced, with men less likely than women to reenter similar occupations. Third, job characteristics such as professional status, short tenure, and regular employment increase the likelihood of occupational continuity. Although policies promote the idea of skill matching, entrenched labor market structures and historical institutional patterns often impede realization. The persistent prevalence of low-skilled roles in the public sector reflects a policy legacy prioritizing short-term poverty relief over sustainable, skills-based employment for the older adults.

Introduction

Population aging is placing growing pressure on global economies, labor markets, and welfare systems, particularly in advanced industrial societies. In the advanced industrial economies of North America, Europe, and Eastern Asia, declining fertility rates and increasing life expectancy have triggered an unprecedented demographic transformation. Notably, South Korea is facing one of the fastest and deepest transitions among the OECD member countries. During the last decade, the South Korean demographic group of 65 years and older has grown at a compound annual growth rate of 4.4%, significantly higher than the OECD average of 2.6% (KOSIS, 2023). This demographic acceleration stems from distinct historical and socio-cultural dynamics, such as the impacts of the Korean War between 1950 and 1953, the baby boom of the post-war years and the sharp decline in birth rates since the 1990s.

Projections estimate that in 2023, South Koreans aged 65 and over will constitute 18.4% of the country's population, or around 9.5 million people. Additionally, some calculations estimate the proportion of this demographic to be around 40% in 2050 (OECD, 2023a). This sharp demographic shift poses a significant challenge for the economy and social institutions in South Korea, as a growing retired population will need to be supported by a declining workforce. Parallel to this accelerated aging, South Korea also faces another pressing demographic concern, and that is the significantly high poverty rate among its older population. South Korea currently has the highest rate of poverty among the older population among OECD countries. In 2020, around 40.4% of people aged 66 years and above lived below the nation's median income line, defined as 50%, which is almost twice the OECD average of 14.2% (OECD, 2023a).

The extraordinarily high poverty rate among older adults in Korea reflects long-standing institutional gaps, including a late-developing pension system and fragmented welfare provision.

Institutional weaknesses have contributed to a significant number of older adults in South Korea staying active in the labor market because of economic necessities. In 2023, the labor force participation rate of people aged 65 and older was around 35.3%, compared to the OECD average of 15.5% for those of the same age group (OECD, 2023b). This high level of the older population's presence in the labor market is a signal of not only the inadequacy of pension income but also changing social norms. More older adults are increasingly finding it difficult to rely on intergenerational support from family members, with an increasing number of them viewing lifelong work as not only acceptable but also beneficial (Ji, 2008; Kim et al., 2022; Taylor-Gooby, 2004). Overall, the pressure to maintain economic activity in advanced ages, mostly to avoid poverty, is a primary feature of aging populations in South Korea.

However, the benefits related to prolonging one's working life are largely determined by the nature of the job and the workplace environment. Lee and Kim (2017) argue that the type of employment that older workers are engaged in is a major determinant of their perceived health status. Their study, which drew data from the Korean Retirement and Income Study, found that older workers who were employed in risky occupations, namely, precarious wage work, essential self-employment, or unpaid household work had significantly poorer health outcomes compared to their peers in stable and secure employment. Job quality and economic security were identified as significant variables in this analysis that explain the difference in health among workers in low-quality jobs and those who are employed in better jobs (Lee & Kim, 2017). Therefore, it points to the key role of job quality in not just the lives of older working-age individuals but also their health and well-being.

Despite the call for active aging, the older labor force in South Korea is largely concentrated in low-paid, insecure, and low-skilled job categories. This finding takes special meaning in light of recent attempts at re-employment of retirees. According to a 2020 report published by the Ministry of Employment and Labor, 20.3% of South Korea's total workforce is employed in low-paid jobs. Further, this number increases to 33.2% in the case of older workers, and to 48.1% in the case of older women, well above the national rate for all workers. Such findings imply an unequal concentration of older workers in underpaid sectors. Even among those re-entering the workforce after retirement, the overall quality of employment is deficient. The percentage of re-employed older workers in stable (regular) positions falls from 43.1% before retirement to just 28.5% after re-entering labor, as the prevalence of non-regular positions dramatically increases some 23.7% of re-employed older workers are found in temporary contracts, and 23.4% in daily-wage jobs (Ahn et al., 2018). These data highlight the prevalent nature of insecure and inferior job opportunities among South Korea’s re-employed older adults. Consistent with these findings, previous research has identified economic exposure and labor insecurity as primary challenges facing rehired older workers (Shin, 2017; Ahn & Kim, 2022; Ahn & Choi, 2016).

A root cause of great concern driving these results is the prevalence of job mismatch, where many older workers are assigned jobs that do not utilize their rich professional experience or skills to their full

potential. Older workers are often placed in jobs that are significantly below their level of educational attainment or beyond their fields of professional experience, resulting in a consistent feeling of under-remuneration and insecurity. Empirical evidence supports this statement: in 2018, it was found that nearly 47.8% of employees aged 55 and over had been in their jobs for less than two years, which means that a considerable percentage of older workers are newcomers in their firms or have moved to their current jobs later in life (Ahn et al., 2018). Among this subgroup of older workers with short job durations, about 33.1% were found to be performing elementary occupations (or low-skilled jobs), while only 13.8% were in professional jobs and 3.6% were technicians, consequently supporting the point that many experienced older workers availed themselves of lower-skilled occupations when they re-entered their working lives (Ahn et al., 2018). Likewise, more than 63% of re-employed men and women in South Korea were found to be in jobs that did not suit the skills they had mastered during their lifetimes (Jung et al., 2016). This underutilization of older workers' skills may contribute to a self-perpetuating cycle of disadvantage. Due to the limited use of their capabilities, many older workers face lower incomes and job insecurity, which, in turn, undermines their economic security and satisfaction.

Thus, it is essential to match employment opportunities with the competencies of older adults in order to achieve maximum outcomes. Past research uniformly suggests that task assignment of aging employees aligned with their prior work experience and skillsets increases productivity and overall performance (Edwards, 1991; Rybash et al., 1986; Ji, 2017). Additionally, recent research shows that older employees feel much greater job satisfaction when working on tasks using the skills acquired over their work life (Ji, 2017). These results support the argument that increased job alignment is termed as the matching of older adults and tasks corresponding with their experience and skills are critical to enhance the well-being of aging employees as well as their productivity. Given the increasing educational attainment and professional experience of retiring cohorts such as the baby boomer generation, the underutilization of older workers' skills represents a significant loss of human capital.

Recognizing this possibility, South Korean planners and organizations have reappraised their policies toward the employment of older workers. There is more emphasis being placed on the creation of career-oriented job opportunities that utilize the previous careers and skills of aging employees, in addition to providing re-skilling or up-skilling programs that can help older workers transition into jobs in which they can use their skills. These policies are intended to prevent situations in which experienced baby boomers are forced to take low-wage, low-skilled jobs that neither recognize nor utilize their experience.

In response to growing risks of job-skill mismatch and the underutilization of older adults' skills, the recent approach to employment policy for older adults in South Korea has been to develop a multi-pillar policy approach. The Fourth Basic Plan for the Promotion of Employment of Older Persons (2023–2027) developed through an inter-ministerial process describes an extensive policy approach to employment of older adults, which includes continued employment, re-employment and skills development, income security, and the development of employment service infrastructure (Joint Ministries, 2023). The plan also recognizes the heterogeneity of the older population, with cohorts born during the baby boom

period entering their 60s showing strong preferences for continued employment and re-employment, compared to the oldest old who show a preference for shorter working hours and opportunities for social participation (Joint Ministries, 2023).

In this regard, the Ministry of Health and Welfare's (MOHW) Third Comprehensive Plan for Senior Jobs and Social Activity Support (2023–2027) constitute a key pillar, with the plan targeting the oldest-old and lower-income individuals through publicly supported job opportunities (MOHW, 2023). In parallel, the policy agenda seeks to diversify publicly supported jobs for older adults, including an expansion of social service–type roles designed to utilize older adults' experience and competencies, alongside stronger placement support into the private labour market (Joint Ministries, 2023; MOHW, 2023). Notably, the Basic Plan reports that the share employed in public administration and health and social services increases markedly with age (from 13.3% among workers in their late 50s to 29.5% among those aged 70 and over), alongside a growing concentration of older workers in health and social services (Joint Ministries, 2023). This study, based on the policy framework presented above, regards "public" employment channels as a broad category, which includes (i) employment service agencies managed by the Ministry of Employment and Labor (MOEL), such as employment centers and the Senior Talent Bank, and (ii) other public job-matching agencies, such as local senior clubs, which are closely related to the implementation of employment programs for older adults.

Another important avenue includes the implementation of extensive job-matching procedures to deal with the problem of job mismatch. In its commitment to this objective, the government has promised to undertake extensive job function analyses with all sectors to establish the jobs most suited to older adults and to match workers with existing jobs corresponding to their past experiences and skills. At the same time, intensive training schemes and upskilling programs have been launched to help aging employees upgrade or adapt their skills to meet changing industries and new technologies. Such measures are geared to enhance the job prospects and confidence of older job seekers, thereby helping to place them into new jobs.

Together with job redesign and training programs, the government enacts legislative schemes and monetary rewards created to encourage businesses to hire and retain older adults. Such programs are inclusive of subsidies and tax benefits for businesses hiring older adults in the labor force. These policies' chief aim is to promote sustainable employment, expand job security and job satisfaction, and encourage continuing social and economic engagement of older adults across Korea. Individually, such actions form part of a proactive approach with the aim of transforming the aging workforce into the country's important asset. Through the matching of employees with jobs fitting their skills and the refinement of their abilities, the government attempts to improve the quality of jobs for older adults while removing the socioeconomic issues brought about by the aging population.

Despite the wide-ranging policy interventions in progress now, initial evidence shows a consistent gap between the announced goals of the policies and the working realities witnessed in the practice. Recent studies show that a considerable percentage of aging South Korean workers are still working in

temporary and low-skilled jobs, failing to leverage their prior skills and experiences (Ahn & Kim, 2022; Jung et al., 2016). The disparity between the policy goals and the tough working realities of many re-employed older adults highlights the need for improved implementation in addition to continuous monitoring. It poses the question of whether current programs are providing adequate re-employment opportunities for aging workers or whether further adjustments are needed.

Within the context of the present research project, this study's objective is to test empirically the effectiveness of public work programs for older adults in South Korea. Based on data collected from the Economic Activity Population Survey of 2024, further supplemented by a tailored survey focused on older adults ordered by Statistics Korea, this research will test the extent to which these programs allow older workers to re-enter work corresponding with their earlier occupations and skills. The goal is to investigate the extent to which the objectives of older worker employment programs namely, matching retirees with appropriate jobs and improving their overall work quality are translated into real-world practice. In seeking to do so, the study aims to provide policymakers with information on best practices and areas where improvement may be made, as well as shedding light on how policymaking efforts may be aligned with the real-world needs of South Korea's aging workforce.

Methods

Participants and procedure

This study aimed to determine how public jobs for older adults in South Korea affect their lifetime employment and similar occupation. To examine this, we used the supplementary survey of the Economically Active Population Survey conducted by the Statistics Korea since the promulgation of the Statistics Act in 1962 as designated statistics (approval number 101004). The purpose of this survey is to establish basic data for establishing development policies for Korea's macroeconomics and human resources by investigating the overall economic activities of the people (e.g. employment, unemployment, work environment). Accordingly, it was judged to be suitable as analysis data for this study.

Therefore, this study to use the data from the ‘2024 Economically Active Population Survey for Seniors’, and the analysis subjects of this study are older adults aged 55 or older who participated in job seeking in the past year and are currently participating in jobs. By setting the analysis subjects as such, 3,123 older workers who responded to this research model were included as analysis subjects.

Study participants

This study targeted older workers who are currently participating in the labor market. The general characteristics of the subjects and the characteristics of the main variables are as shown in Table 1 below. First, the average age was 66.40 years (SD = 6.82), and women(55.43%) were more numerous than men(44.57%). The education was overwhelmingly high school graduates or lower (81.36%), and the

proportion of those with spouses was higher (65.99%). Lastly, the public pension amount was KRW 100 million or less (30.74%), KRW 200–249 million or less (17.16%), and the lowest proportion was KRW 300 million or more (9.32%).

Looking at the employment-related situations of the subjects, most of them worked for the purpose of income (99.20%). In addition, when examining whether their jobs were similar to their main jobs in life, there were slightly more people working in similar occupation (53.09%). In addition, their job acquisition path was more in the private sector (56.84%) than in the public sector (46.16%). In terms of their occupations, the proportion of non-professionals (94.30%) was overwhelmingly high, and in terms of employment status, temporary (57.80%), regular (25.74%), and daily (16.46%) workers were the most common. In addition, when looking at their longest period of employment, those with less than 10 years accounted for the largest proportion (38.84%), while those with 30 years or more accounted for the smallest proportion (16.33%).

Table 1
Demographic description.

Variable	Eldely (N = 3,123)
Age	66.40 ± 6.82
Gender	
female	1,731 (55.43%)
male	1,392 (44.57%)
Education	
<=High School	2,541 (81.36%)
>College	582 (18.64%)
Marriage	
No spouse	1,062 (34.01%)
Has a spouse	2,061 (65.99%)
Work purpose	
Work for income	3,098 (99.20%)
Not Work for income	25 (0.80%)
Re-employment of the older adults in similar occupations	
Similar occupation	1,658 (53.09%)
Not similar occupation	1,465 (46.91%)
Job acquisition path	
Public	1,348 (43.16%)
Private	1,775 (56.84%)
Occupation	
Professional	178 (5.70%)
Non-professional	2,945 (94.30%)
Job status	
Permanent	804 (25.74%)
Temporary	1,805 (57.80%)
Daily	514 (16.46%)
Note. Mean ±standard deviation or Values are frequency (percent)	

Variable	Eldely (N = 3,123)
Longest tenure	
< 10 years	1,213 (38.84%)
10–19 years	888 (28.43%)
20–29 years	512 (16.39%)
> 30 years	510 (16.33%)
Pension benefit[1]	
< 100 million KRW	960 (30.74%)
100–149 million KRW	500 (16.01%)
150–199 million KRW	501 (16.04%)
200–249 million KRW	534 (17.10%)
250–299 million KRW	337 (10.79%)
> 300 million KRW	291 (9.32%)
Note. Mean ±standard deviation or Values are frequency (percent)	

[1] At the time of the survey (2020), the average exchange rate was about 1,086 won per dollar.

Measure

Independent Variable. The independent variable of this study is the job acquisition path of the older adults, and we wanted to distinguish whether the job acquisition path is through the public sector or the private sector. Accordingly, the analysis data of this study asked how they found their current job, and the answers to this question were composed of “1. Through the Ministry of Employment and Labor’s employment center, senior citizen talent bank, etc., 2. Through other public employment agencies (local senior clubs, etc., 3. Through private employment agencies, 4. Through newspapers, magazines, the internet, etc., 5. Inquiring or visiting businesses, 6. Asking for introductions from friends and acquaintances, 7. Preparing for self-employment, 8. Others.” Accordingly, this study defined 1 and 2, which are routes through the public sector, as “1. Public jobs,” and 3 to 8, which are routes through the private sector, as “0. Private jobs.” Accordingly, the reference variable for the independent variable is “0. Private sector jobs.”

Dependent Variable. The dependent variable of this study is whether re-employment of the older adults in similar occupations to their main job throughout their lives. This is called “similar occupation” in this study, and in the analysis data, this is asked as “To what extent is your current job related to your main career (work) in life?” and the measurement is “1. Not related at all, 2. Not very related, 3. Slightly related,

4. Very related.” Therefore, this study attempted to conduct the study by converting the responses 1 and 2 to “0. Not related to similar occupation,” and the responses 3 and 4 to “1. Related to similar occupation.” Accordingly, the reference variable of the dependent variable of this study is “0. Not related to similar occupation.”

Control Variables. This study set variables that affect the employment of the older adults as control variables (Sprague, 1994; Shultz & Wang, 2007; Von Bonsdorff et al., 2009; Kang & Kim, 2014). Accordingly, gender, age, education, presence of spouse, work purpose, public benefit, longest tenure, occupation, and employment status were set. The detailed variable definitions are as follows. First, gender was converted to “0. Female, 1. Male,” and age was directly entered as a continuous variable being measured. Education level was converted to “0. High school or lower, 1. Colleage or higher” and presence of spouse was converted to “0. No spouse, 1. Spouse.” In addition, since the analysis data of this study included a question asking whether employment was for income, this was used to convert it to “0. Not employment for income, 1. Employment for income.” In addition, in the case of public pension benefit, their pension amounts were logarithmized and entered to assume a normal distribution. In addition, the longest tenure was input as a continuous variable, and the occupation was used to convert the job type corresponding to “Managers and Experts” into “1. Professionals” and other job types into “0. Not Professionals”. Finally, the employment status was set as “1. Regular workers, 2. Temporary workers, 3. Daily workers” using the measurement of the analysis data as it is.

Data analysis

This study aimed to examine whether older Korean workers who found jobs in the public sector end up in occupations similar to those they have held throughout their lives. To this end, this study used three major research methods. The first research method used descriptive statistics to confirm the general information of the analysis subjects. The second research method used correlation analysis to examine the relationship between variables before analyzing the research model. And the last research method used logistic regression analysis to analyze this research model. All analyses in this study were conducted using STATA 17.0 software.

Results

Differences in Similar Occupation Employment Rates by Socioeconomic Characteristic

This study utilized chi-square tests of independence, a standard analytic procedure for categorical data, to examine distributional differences in the proportion of older adults returning to similar occupations across sex, age, education level, job acquisition path, and occupational type. This preliminary analysis provides a foundational basis for interpreting the subsequent multivariate logistic regression results by identifying potential heterogeneity in group-specific distributions prior to model estimation.

Chi-square tests revealed significant group differences in the likelihood of older workers returning to similar occupations across all socioeconomic characteristics examined. First, older adults women were more likely than older men to be reemployed in occupations similar to their lifelong primary job (2 (1) = 5.01, p<.05). Significant differences also emerged across age groups within older adults population (2 (2) = 139.02, p<.001), showing a continuous decline in similar-occupation reemployment among the older age brackets of older adults. Differences by education level indicated that older adults with college or higher education were more likely to return to similar occupations than those with a high school education or below (2 (1) = 22.04, p<.001). A highly significant association was also observed for job acquisition path (2 (1) = 200.00, p<.001), with older workers who entered employment through private-sector channels demonstrating substantially higher rates of similar-occupation reemployment than those entering through the public sector. Finally, occupational type showed a strong relationship with similar-occupation reemployment (2 (1) = 99.52, p<.001), such that older professionals were far more likely than older non-professionals to work in jobs aligned with their previous career trajectory

Table 2

Similar occupation rates by socioeconomic characteristic(χ^2 test)

Socioeconomic characteristic variable	**Similar occupation ratio**
Sex	
Male	44.57%
Female	55.43%
Age	
< 65	44.83%
65>=&<75	38.58%
>=75	16.59%
Education	
<=High School	44.90%
>College	55.67%
Job acquisition path	
Public	32.42%
Private	57.92%
Occupation	
Professional	83.15%
Non-professional	44.72%

Note. Chi-square tests revealed significant group differences in the likelihood of returning to similar occupations across socioeconomic characteristics examined. Specifically, significant differences were found by sex (χ^2 (1) = 5.01, p<.05), age (χ^2 (2) = 139.02, p<.001), education level (χ^2 (1) = 22.04, p<.001), job acquisition path (χ^2 (1) = 200.00, p<.001), and occupational type (χ^2 (1) = 99.52, p<.001).

Correlation analysis results

In this study, the relationship between variables before analyzing the research model was examined through correlation analysis and VIF coefficient. First, the result of the correlation analysis between variables was 0.002 (work purpose and similar occupation), and the maximum was 0.563 (age and public benefit). In addition, the correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable was 0.253(*p*<.001). Next, the VIF coefficient value was also 1.48 on average, 1.01 at minimum, and 2.18 at maximum. Accordingly, it was determined that the correlation between the variables was not high and was therefore suitable for research model analysis.

Research model analysis results

The purpose of this study was to determine whether re-employment through the public sector increases the likelihood that older workers will return to similar occupations. This research model was verified through logistic regression analysis, and the results of the study are as follows in <Table 3>. The logistic regression model showed good overall fit (LR $\chi^2(11) = 438.40$, $p < .001$). The McFadden pseudo R^2 was .102 and the Nagelkerke R^2 was .175, indicating acceptable model performance for logistic specifications.

The results of the analysis showed that the job acquisition route had a significant effect on working in similar occupation(*OR* = 0.545, $p < .001$). However, this study hypothesized that since Korea's labor market policy for older workers is to actively utilize skilled labor throughout their lives, jobs through the public sector would increase the possibility of working in similar occupation. However, the results of the analysis showed that, on the contrary, those who obtained jobs through the public sector had a significantly lower possibility of working in similar occupation. Accordingly, this study examined the ratio of those working in similar occupation by job acquisition route in Table 2 to confirm the detailed ratio. As a result, 32.42% of those who obtained jobs through the public sector were working in similar occupation, and 57.92% of those who obtained jobs through the private sector were working in similar occupation.

Based on Oh et al.(2023) research, this study examined the influence of demographic and economic activity-related variables that affect the jobs of older workers by entering them as control variables. As a result, gender in demographic factors, and job type, years of service, and employment status in economic activity-related factors significantly affected similar occupation. Accordingly, men were less likely to work in similar occupation than women(*OR* = 0.821, $p < .05$). In terms of occupation, professionals were more likely to work in similar occupation than non-professionals(*OR* = 5.447, $p < .001$), and the longer the years of job, the lower the likelihood of working in similar occupation(*OR* = 0.973, $p < .001$). In addition, temporary workers were less likely to work in similar occupation than permanent workers in terms of employment status(*OR* = 0.761, $p < .01$).

Table 3
Logistic regression results for the research model

	Relevance to lifelong primary job [Not similar job]					
Variables	*OR*	*SE*	*95% CI*			*p*
Job acquisition path [Private]	0.545	0.052	0.452	-	0.658	0.000
Age	0.996	0.008	0.981	-	1.011	0.600
Gender [female]	0.821	0.078	0.682	-	0.989	0.038
Education [> College]	0.939	0.106	0.753	-	1.171	0.577
Marry [No spouse]	1.006	0.084	0.853	-	1.185	0.946
Work purpose [Not work for income]	1.531	0.678	0.643	-	3.646	0.336
Occupation [Non-professional]	5.477	1.222	3.537	-	8.482	0.000
Longest tenure	0.973	0.004	0.966	-	0.980	0.000
Job status [Permanent] *Temporary	0.761	0.078	0.622	-	0.931	0.008
Job status [Permanent] *Daily	1.002	0.127	0.781	-	1.284	0.990
Pension benefit	1.198	0.040	1.122	-	1.280	0.000
Model fit						
-Log likelihood	-1939.53					
-LR (11) $\chi 2$	438.40***					
-McFadden R2	0.102					
-Nagelkerke R2	0.175					
Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001						

Discussion

Korean society is working to improve the public pension system and actively engage the older workers in the labor market as a policy to ensure a better life in old age. In particular, in the changing population structure due to aging and low birth rates, the policy direction is to utilize the skilled labor force of the older adults in the labor market (Hirazawa & Yakita, 2017; Kim, 2020). In other words, Korea is seeking to boost productivity by drawing the experience and skills of older workers in response to a shrinking economically active population. However, despite this policy shift, older workers in Korea remain largely concentrated in low-skilled, temporary, and daily jobs (Ji, 2022; Kim, 2023). Accordingly, this study aimed to confirm whether job acquisition through the public sector reflects policy changes.

The main research results of this study are summarized as follows. First, among the older workers, those who obtained jobs through the public sector were significantly less likely to work in jobs similar to their jobs throughout their lives than those who obtained jobs through the private sector. Second, among demographic factors, only gender had a significant influence. Accordingly, men were significantly less likely to work in similar occupation than women. This appears to be a result of the fact that women had a higher rate of working in simple labor and service occupations when they entered the labor market as economically active population. In other words, it appears that women are more likely to work in similar occupation than men because jobs in old age are mainly concentrated in simple labor and service occupations. Third, among economic activity factors, professional status, longest tenure, and employment status had a significant effect on working in similar occupation. Specifically, professionals, those who worked for a short period of time, and those who were permanent workers (compared to temporary workers) were more likely to work in similar occupation. This is consistent with the research results examined in Oh et al. (2023) study, and the reason why there is still a high demand for professionals in Korean society is likely because they can work while utilizing their expertise even after retirement.

The implications and policy recommendations for this are as follows. This study confirms the passive attitude toward providing similar occupation for older workers in the public sector in Korean society and the inconsistency between policy direction and actual delivery system. The analysis results of this study showed that when jobs for older workers are in the public sector, the likelihood of having jobs similar to those they have throughout their lives is lower. Accordingly, this study examined the labor market policy for older workers in Korea in detail to find out why this phenomenon occurs. In Korea, a group of older workers with different life experiences than the older generation in the past is entering old age. This group with different life experiences is the baby boomer generation, and unlike the older generation in the past, they are a group with high levels of education and socioeconomic status, and there are many highly skilled workers. However, in the past, Korea rapidly expanded public employment programs for older adults as a policy response to the high poverty rate among this population, concentrating jobs in low-wage sectors such as small-scale, irregular, and temporary work, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and basic manual labor.

That said, the current policy direction in Korea aims to actively engage highly skilled older workers in the labor market. However, the findings of this study indicate a disconnect between policy goals and actual implementation. Specifically public employment programs for older adults remain primarily focused on job provision rather than job quality or alignment with individual skills and preferences. This suggests that the system continues to be path dependent, with limited structural change (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013). In other words, it can be evaluated that the path dependency of the service provision system is delaying the transition to a changed policy direction.

Also, as labor market structure perspective, these results can also be explained by the polarization theory in the structural aspect of the labor market (Autor, 2010). Principal events, such as the evolution of technological advancements in production and globalization forces from the 1980s, have led to the

mechanization and automation of the majority of routine jobs, thereby displacing a significant proportion of middle-skill workers (Autor, Levy, & Murnane, 2003). In the face of such structural labor market adjustments, older employees who had been employed in manufacturing jobs, technical jobs, or mid-management posts were quickly laid off from work or retired due to industrial reorganization. These middle-skill jobs were replaced by low-skill service jobs, which expanded in no time with the opening of the service economy. Reemployment paths of older workers can then be explained in terms of such labor market structural changes (Autor & Dorn, 2013). Consequently, it has been observed that older retired workers are re-employed in readily accessible low-skilled service jobs that lack good matching with their already possessed skills, a thing that is attributable to the current labor market framework.

In the past, there were concerns that the participation of the older adults in the labor market would decrease work productivity due to the decline in biological functions, but recent studies have suggested that work proficiency accumulated in old age actually increases work productivity. In fact, it is projected that the economic and social contributions of the older adults will increase GDP per capita by 1-2.5% annually worldwide (Vereinte, 2023). In particular, Korea is currently in a juncture where the human capital of older adults is expected to play a critical role in addressing labor shortages and enhancing national competitiveness. Accordingly, it is necessary to establish a legal system that provides a foundation for their expertise and experience to be utilized in society, and to swiftly move policy so that the actual policy direction and detailed policies are consistent. In addition, in the case of Korea, employing older workers in their former occupations may impose a wage burden to employers due to the problem of seniority in the labor market.

This suggests that the effective utilization of skills and experience among older workers will require a preceding strengthening of public employment opportunities before job-matching programs can be set up. The study proposes three strategic directions to improve and expand public employment opportunities for older adults.. The first thing that has to be done is the creation of professional positions in a caregiving and safety management official role. As an example, for caregiving, it covers everything from simple day-to-day assistance to health care-linked caregiving manager or smart device usability for caregiving services. In this industry, jobs range from simple security guard work to facility safety inspection specialists among other unique jobs that tap the experience and skill of older adults.

Secondly, the training of older workers and retraining needs to be improved. The programs should be built to allow for something more than just the performance of basic tasks: to learn new technologies and knowledge. Such training should overtly be related to specific jobs, including the use of digital technologies, complex caregiving approaches, and safety inspection methods. This would assist the older workers to adapt to new roles and participate in an active way for a very long period of time.

Third, the transition to an increase in jobs with social service-oriented activities and private sectors need to be highly encouraged. Employment that values highly the social contribution of older workers should be developed, such as community caregiving, disaster management, or public facility inspections, through a public-private partnership program. Moreover, it will be required to completely establish a

system of job delivery that meets regional needs. In particular, the jobs need to be prioritized with job creation with the private sector so that the sustainability will be ensured (MOHW, 2023).

Finally, this study suggests that fostering intergenerational linkages with younger cohorts should be considered as a strategy for more effective utilization of older workers' accumulated skills and experience. Policies that promote the use of older adults' human capital and encourage their labor market participation have often been met with concerns that such efforts may crowd out employment opportunities for younger workers. Empirical evidence on this issue remains mixed, with some studies reporting a significant negative association between older adults' labor market participation and youth employment, while others find little to no meaningful impact (Ji, 2022).

Nevertheless, the current labor market conditions in Korea call for a reconsideration of this debate. The Korean labor market has been widely characterized as stagnant, with increasingly high barriers to entry for young adults (Jeong, 2019). In particular, employers have come to demand immediately deployable skills and work-ready experience even from new labor market entrants, reinforcing what has been described as a "non-entry-level entry" structure. Under these circumstances, young people face not only prolonged difficulties in securing stable employment but also heightened risks of social isolation and delayed transitions into adulthood (Cho, 2025).

Against this backdrop, developing employment models that enable older workers to share their accumulated expertise with younger generations may offer benefits beyond the simple expansion of older-age employment. Such models can support younger workers' labor market adjustment while fostering complementary and mutually reinforcing intergenerational relationships. For example, mentoring-based and collaborative job arrangements that facilitate the transfer of practical knowledge and workplace know-how from older to younger workers may help mitigate intergenerational tensions and promote greater intergenerational integration within the labor market.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the analysis was conducted solely based on quantitative data derived from the 2024 Economically Active Population Survey, which limits the depth of understanding regarding qualitative dimensions of older adults' employment experiences, such as individual motivations, perceived barriers, and subjective job satisfaction. Future studies employing qualitative approaches could provide richer insights into older workers' lived experiences. Second, the analysis did not consider regional disparities across Korea, which could be significant in determining the effectiveness and availability of public employment programs, thus overlooking critical contextual variations. Additionally, the subjective measurement used to evaluate occupational similarity, relying on self-reported responses, might introduce bias or inaccuracies. Future research should incorporate objective measures, such as occupation classification codes (e.g., ISCO-08), to achieve more precise comparisons. Lastly, given the cross-sectional nature of the dataset, this study was unable to capture dynamic changes or long-term employment trajectories of older adults. Longitudinal data could

provide a more comprehensive understanding of how older workers transition through employment over time.

Conclusion

This study highlights significant discrepancies between the intended policy goals of Korean public employment programs and the actual outcomes related to occupational matching for older adults. Although recent policies have emphasized skill utilization and alignment with previous career experiences, older workers remain disproportionately engaged in precarious and low-quality employment opportunities. Structural labor market factors, entrenched policy legacies, and limited programmatic adaptations hinder effective occupational matching, perpetuating poverty and economic vulnerability among older adults. To address these challenges, policy efforts should emphasize tailored occupational assessments, expanded skill-specific training initiatives, and strengthened collaboration between public agencies and private sectors. Ultimately, achieving meaningful alignment between older adults' previous occupational expertise and their post-retirement employment opportunities is essential to promoting economic security, productivity, and overall quality of life among Korea's rapidly aging population.

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