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Abstracts

Korean society has experienced significant population ageing. The rapid increase of the older population has helped to create the problem of the elderly poor. The difficult social and economic situations of the older poor make it impossible for them to maintain their income at a sustainable level. The strong hegemony of the developmental state and the decrease of intra-family support following family disintegration are among the reasons for the backwardness of elderly welfare in Korea.

'Poverty' can be defined as the status in which incomes or assets are insufficient. In addition, those whose earnings are below minimum cost of living (the poverty line) can experience relative deprivation as well as poverty. Older people who suffer from income inequality are especially vulnerable to poverty. Older people are in danger of being excluded from society, family and contact with relatives.

The Korean governments and society have concentrated on economic growth. As a result, the Korean people have lived in a relatively abundant society. In the 1990s, the poverty rate was just 5%. However, after the IMF financial crisis that led to the economic downturn, the number of those who are in poverty has increased sharply as a result of mass unemployment. In effect, many Korean older people have had to go through poverty on a low income. Furthermore, it is true that there has been a sharp increase in the numbers of those who are exposed to economic hardship, such as people in non-regular work and the poor self-employed.

The poverty rate of older people reached 45% in 2009 (38.7% in 2008). What is more, the Korean elderly poor have recently experienced a new form of poverty. The major reason for their poverty is that they have low skills and inferior education. However, the most persuasive explanation is that the Korean social security system is not yet fully established. In the labour market, older people cannot find jobs and experience age discrimination, which is a serious barrier to them in entering the labour market.