

# KICCE POLICY BRIEF

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## Parental Perspectives on Quality of their Life in Korea: Evidence from a Cross-Country Study<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

- Recently, negative perceptions of child-rearing have dispersed in Korean society due to the changes in social values.
  - This change in social values suggests that Korean society can no longer expect to improve the birth rate by simply offering financial incentives to parents.
- As a result, parent's happiness and quality of life have become important factors in childbirth and childcare policies.
- Therefore, in order to guide the direction of policies that support parents and families, problems and improvements in the quality of life of households facing childbirth and childcare need to be accurately diagnosed.
  - This brief aims to objectively draw up problems and improvements in the quality of life of Korea's households experiencing childbirth and childcare through international comparisons of the parent's quality of life.

### Method

- *European Quality of Life Survey* was used for an international comparison of parent's quality of life.
  - Quality of Life Survey on Korean parents was conducted on 300 households with children under the age of 12 in 2019.

- The 2019 survey results on Korean parents' quality of life were compared with the 2016 European Quality of Life Survey results, specifically with the EU households with children under the age of 12.
  - The countries that have quality of life data comparable to those of Korean parents were a total of 33, including 28 EU member countries and candidates for EU membership, such as Albania, FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.
- The comparative indicator of parent's quality of life was developed by referring to the EU's quality of life area, and it is divided into three dimensions: 1) quality of life, 2) quality of public service and 3) quality of society.

[Table 1] Dimensions of Quality of Parental Life

Dimensions	Sub-variables
Quality of life	subjective wellbeing, standard of living, housing condition, health/mental wellbeing, work-life balance
Quality of public service	health and medical care, child-care service, education
Quality of society	social security, trust and tension, gender equality

Source: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-quality-of-life-surveys/european-quality-of-life-survey-2016> (Retrieved 10. 8. 2020).

1. This brief is based on contents of *An international comparative study of parental happiness: an analysis of parental quality of life in Korea* written by Jaehee Lee, Changhyun Park, Eun young Park, Ji yeh Choi(2019).

## Major Findings

### Quality of Life

- **Subjective wellbeing** is an indicator that includes satisfaction with life, happiness, and optimism about the future.
  - The country with the highest subjective wellbeing was Sweden, followed by Denmark, Finland, and Austria, while Korea ranked substantially low at 32<sup>nd</sup> place.
- **The standard of living** is an indicator that includes satisfaction with living standards, difficulty in maintaining a living, and financial burden.
  - The countries with the highest standard of living were Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Finland and Luxemburg, while Korea ranked 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- **Housing conditions** include indicators of floor, ceiling, window status, lack of a toilet and shower facilities, and appropriateness of heating facilities.
  - Slovakia ranked high in housing conditions, followed by the Czech Republic, Germany, Austria and Finland, while Korea ranked substantially low at 32<sup>nd</sup> place.

[Table 2] The ranking of quality of life dimension

Subjective wellbeing		Standard of living		Housing condition	
ranking	country	ranking	country	ranking	country
1	Sweden	1	Sweden	1	Slovakia
2	Denmark	2	Denmark	2	Czech Republic
3	Finland	3	Austria	3	Germany
4	Austria	4	Finland	4	Austria
5	Ireland	5	Luxembourg	5	Finland
	:		:		:
32	Korea	22	Korea	32	Korea
	:		:		:
34	Greece	34	Albania	34	Albania

Source: Lee, J., Park, C., Park, E. Y., & Choi, J.(2019). An international comparative study of parental happiness: an analysis of parental quality of life. Korea Institute of Child care and Education. pp. 135-136.

- **Health/mental wellbeing** is an indicator that includes the self-evaluated level of physical and mental health.
  - Health/mental wellbeing was highest in Ireland, followed by Finland, Sweden, Montenegro and Austria, while Korea ranked the lowest at 34<sup>th</sup> place.
- **Work-life balance** is an indicator that includes fatigue after work, difficulty in playing a role as a family member due to

work, and difficulty in performing a task at work owing to a role at home.

- Germany had the highest work-life balance, followed by Denmark, Finland, and the Netherlands, while Korea ranked 29<sup>th</sup> place.

[Table 3] The ranking of quality of life dimension (cont'd)

Health/mental wellbeing		Work life balance	
ranking	country	ranking	country
1	Ireland	1	Germany
2	Finland	2	Denmark
3	Sweden	3	Finland
4	Montenegro	4	Netherlands
5	Austria	5	Slovakia
	:		:
32	Romania	29	Korea
33	Estonia		:
34	Korea	34	Croatia

Source: Lee, J., Park, C., Park, E. Y., & Choi, J.(2019). An international comparative study of parental happiness: an analysis of parental quality of life. Korea Institute of Child care and Education. p. 137.

### Quality of Public Service

- **Health and medical care** is an indicator that include satisfaction with medical services, quality of general hospital and health center services, and the quality of large-sized hospital services.
  - Austria ranked the highest in health and medical care, followed by Malta, Luxemburg, Denmark and Finland. Korea ranked 9<sup>th</sup>, a relatively high ranking.
- **Childcare service** is an indicator that includes satisfaction with childcare service, quality of facilities, professionalism of teachers, degree of teacher interest, provision of information and counseling on childcare, and curricula and activities.
  - Lithuania had the highest ranked child care service, followed by Finland, Austria, Ireland and the United Kingdom, while Korea ranked 18<sup>th</sup>.
- **Education** is an indicator that includes satisfaction with education system, quality of facilities, professionalism of teachers, degree of teacher interest, provision of information and counseling on education, and curricula and activities.
  - Malta ranked the highest in education, followed by Ireland, Finland, Estonia and Lithuania, while Korea ranked 30<sup>th</sup>.

[Table 4] The ranking of quality of public service dimension

Health and medical care,		Child care service		Education	
ranking	country	ranking	country	ranking	country
1	Austria	1	Lithuania	1	Malta
2	Malta	2	Finland	2	Ireland
3	Luxembourg	3	Austria	3	Finland
4	Germany	4	Czech Republic	4	Estonia
5	Finland	5	Ireland	5	Lithuania
:	:	:	:	:	:
9	Korea	18	Korea	30	Korea
:	:	:	:	:	:
34	Greece	34	FYR of Macedonia	34	FYR of Macedonia

Source: Lee, J., Park, C., Park, E. Y., & Choi, J.(2019). An international comparative study of parental happiness: an analysis of parental quality of life. Korea Institute of Child care and Education. pp. 138-139.

### Quality of Society

- **Social security** is an indicator that includes concerns on senior income, satisfaction with current economic conditions, and satisfaction with the way democracy works.
  - The country with the highest social security ranking was Sweden, followed by Denmark, Luxembourg, Sweden, the Netherlands and Finland, while Korea ranked 16<sup>th</sup>, the median.
- **Trust and tension** is an indicator that include trust in others, trust in the government, trust in local governments, conflicts between rich and poor, men and women, and races.
  - The highest ranking country in trust and tension was Denmark, followed by Finland, Luxemburg, and Netherlandslands, while Korea ranked 33<sup>rd</sup>.
- **Gender equality** is an indicator of the degree of childcare and household shared by the couples.
  - Sweden ranked highest in gender equality, followed by Latvia and Finland, while Korea ranked 12<sup>nd</sup>.

[Table 5] The ranking of quality of society dimension

Social security		Trust and tension		Gender equality	
ranking	country	ranking	country	ranking	country
1	Sweden	1	Denmark	1	Sweden
2	Denmark	2	Finland	2	Latvia
3	Luxembourg	3	Luxembourg	3	Finland
4	Netherlands	4	Netherlands	4	Denmark
5	Finland	5	Sweden	5	Estonia
:	:	:	:	:	:
17	Korea	32	Croatia	12	Korea
:	:	33	Korea	:	:
34	Albania	34	Albania	34	Albania

Source: Lee, J., Park, C., Park, E. Y., & Choi, J.(2019). An international comparative study of parental happiness: an analysis of parental quality of life. Korea Institute of Child care and Education. pp. 135-136, 141-143.

### Policy Suggestions

- Korean government needs to continue implementing policies that allow improvement in parents' quality of life to accomplish the national vision of establishing a country where parents are willing to raise a child.
- The Korean parents' quality of life in specific sub-dimensions, which ranked low in comparisons with European countries, deserves attention for improvement.
  - In particular, as the ranking of housing conditions in Korea was substantially low, it is necessary to set a priority in developing support measures.
  - As the ranking for work and family compatibility was also lower than that of European countries, the policy of supporting a work-family balance should be strengthened.
  - The quality of education and childcare services for young children aged 0 to 5 years as well as of public education needs to be improved.
  - Finally, to increase the level of acceptability and implementation of policy tasks that aims to build a nation where parents are willing to raise a child, policy measures should be sought to raise the level of trust in parents and the public.

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