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## Influence of employment on life satisfaction of people with intellectual disabilities in South Korea

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the effect of employment on the degree of life satisfaction of people with intellectual disabilities. For this purpose, the original data of the 2019 Panel Survey of Employment (2nd wave 4th survey data) was used for the analysis. The results of the study are as follows. First, Age and gender had a significant influence on the degree of life satisfaction. Second, employment had a statistically significant effect on life satisfaction of people with intellectual disabilities. Based on the results of this study, it was proposed to develop the vocational abilities of the intellectually disabled, to continuously develop jobs suitable for the intellectually disabled, and to provide incentives to employers who employ the intellectually disabled.

**Keywords:** Intellectual disability, employment, life satisfaction

### 1. Introduction

In modern society, work is a source of income necessary for human beings to live a human life, and it is an important means of being recognized and actively participating in mainstream society. Through work, human beings can feel satisfaction as a member of society and pursue happiness.

Due to the importance of these jobs, it is very important for the disabled who are easily marginalized from society to maintain income through work and not to be excluded from society. The employment of the disabled is directly related to the quality of life of the disabled, and the ultimate goal of the employment policy for the disabled is to improve the quality of life (Park & Kim, 2015). However, since it is very difficult for the disabled to enter the labor market or maintain a job, it is difficult to integrate into society through work and to pursue life satisfaction (Lim & Lee, 2011; Kim, 2013).

In Korea, the Employment Promotion Act for the Disabled was introduced in 1990 to improve the difficulties of employment for the disabled and various programs are supporting the disabled to enjoy a happy life while working. However, according to data from the National Statistical Office of the Republic of Korea in 2020 (Statistics Office, 2020), the employment rate for persons with disabilities was 34.9% as of 2019, which is slightly more than half of the total population employment rate (60.9%). Also, in the announcement of the results of the survey on the condition of the disabled in 2020 (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2021), the proportion of recipients of public assistance system among the disabled was 19.0%, which is about 5.3 times higher than the beneficiary rate of 3.6% of the total population (as of December 2019). This shows that people with disabilities who cannot do income activities are experiencing great economic hardship and do not have the most basic living conditions.

It is more difficult for the intellectually disabled to find employment among the disabled, and the government has continued to make efforts to support the employment of the intellectually disabled through various programs. However, according to the 2020 Survey on Economic Activity for Persons with Disabilities (Korea Employment Promotion Agency for the Disabled, 2020), the employment rate of persons with intellectual disabilities is 23.3%, which is very low as the employment rate of all persons with disabilities (34.9%).

Eventually in order to increase the life satisfaction of the intellectually disabled, it is

necessary to more actively support the employment of the intellectually disabled, and prior to this, it should be made to reveal clearly the relationship between employment and life satisfaction of people with intellectual disabilities.

Researchers have been trying to reveal the relationship between employment and life satisfaction of the disabled, and several papers have suggested that employment factors of the disabled are related to 'life satisfaction' or 'quality of life' (Choi, 2009; Im & Lee, 2011; Kim, 2013; Kim & Kim, 2015; Ju et al., 2018). However, it is difficult to find papers empirically demonstrating the relationship between the two factors for people with intellectual disabilities.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to empirically reveal how the employment affects life satisfaction of people with intellectual disabilities.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1 Research Design

This study set life satisfaction as a dependent variable and employment status as an independent variable in order to verify the effect of employment status on life satisfaction of people with intellectual disabilities. Also, demographic characteristics (age, gender, educational background) were set as control variables.

### 2.2 Materials

For this purpose, the original data of the 2019 Panel Survey of Employment (2nd wave 4th survey data) was used for the analysis.

The 4th survey data was conducted for 3 months from May 2019 for 4,577 people aged 15 to 64 as of May 15, 2016, constructed through the first survey data, and 3,818 people who responded to the 4th survey (Korea Employment Promotion Agency for the Disabled, 2020), and in this study, 363 people with intellectual disabilities among the entire panel were used as analysis data.

### 2.3. Variables

#### 2.3.1 Dependent Variable: Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction Variable in this study was measured on a 4-point Likert scale utilized for the descriptive statistics; very unsatisfied=1, unsatisfied=2, satisfied=3, very satisfied=4.

#### 2.3.2 Independent Variable: Employment

Employment Variable was included as an independent variable, and measured as a dummy variable (employment=1, non-employment=0).

#### 2.3.3 Control Variables: Demographic characteristics

Age, gender and educational background were included as control variables. Gender was measured as a dummy variable (male=1, female=0). Educational background was measured by the total number of years of education from elementary school to graduate school.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

Frequency, mean, and standard deviation were analyzed for descriptive statistical analysis of the general characteristics

of subjects and characteristics of major variables. A regression analysis was conducted to analyze the effect of employment on life satisfaction of the intellectually disabled. For data analysis, SPSS 18.0 statistical package was used

## 3. Results & Discussion

The results of analyzing the general characteristics of the subjects are shown in <Table 1>. The average age was 34.8 years, and the 15-29 age group accounted for the most at 40.2%. In terms of gender, there were more males than females at 232 (63.9%), and 218 (60.1%) of high school graduates accounted for the largest proportion of education background. Regarding employment status, 255 people (70.2%) were unemployed, and more than 108 people (29.8%) who were employed.

The results of descriptive statistics showing the characteristics of independent variable and dependent variable are shown in <Table 2>. The independent variable, employment status, was measured as a dummy variable, and the average value was 0.2975. The dependent variable, life satisfaction, was measured on a 4-point scale, and the average value was 3.12. In the results of Skew and Kurtosis analysis to determine the normality of variables, absolute skewness 3 or higher and absolute kurtosis 8 or higher, which are generally discussed as having a problem with normality, were all lower than those of 8 or 10, so normality was verified.

< Table 3> shows the results of regression analysis on the effects of employment status on life satisfaction of the intellectually disabled. The explanatory power of this model was 14.3%, and the VIF was less than 10.0 in all variables, indicating that there was no problem of multicollinearity.

As a result of a regression analysis analyzing the effect of employment on life satisfaction of the intellectually disabled, first, age ( $t=-2.151$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and gender ( $t=-3.260$ ,  $p<.01$ ) among the control variables had a significant effect. The younger the age, the more satisfied with daily life, and it was found that women were more satisfied with their daily life than men.

On the other hand, education did not appear to have a significant effect. This is different from the results of a study by Clayton and Chubon (1994) (recited in Bak, 2003), who reported that the educational level of people with spinal cord injury was related to life satisfaction. Soon, it was confirmed that the relationship between education level and life differed depending on the type of disability. Second, the independent variable, employment of the intellectually disabled, was analyzed to have a statistically significant effect on life satisfaction ( $t=5.916$ ,  $p<.001$ ). In other words, it was analyzed that those with intellectual disabilities who were employed were more satisfied with their daily life than those who did not work. The results of this study reveal that employment of the intellectually disabled, which has not been demonstrated so far, is an important variable that directly affects life satisfaction, and shows that an active employment support policy is necessary to improve the quality of life of the disabled.

**Table 1:** The General Characteristics of Respondents (Total Number=363).

Variables	Classification	N	%
Age (Average=34.8)	15~29	146	40.2
	30~39	98	27.0

	40~49	70	19.3
	50~59	37	10.2
	60~67	12	3.3
Gender	Female	131	36.1
	Male	232	63.9
Degree of education (Average duration of education =10years)	uneducated	34	9.4
	elementary school	36	9.9
	middle school	53	14.6
	high school	218	60.1
	university	22	6.1
Employment Status	Employed	108	29.8
	Unemployed	255	70.2

**Table 2:** The Characteristics of Variables.

Variable	Min	Max.	Mean	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
Employment Status	0	1	.2975	.4578	.889	-1.216
Life Satisfaction	1	4	3.12	.668	-.483	.502

**Table 3:** The Influence of Employment on Life Satisfaction.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	VIF	
	B	SE	β				
(constant)	3.268	.190			17.191		
Age	-.007	.003	-.123		-2.151*	1.376	
Gender	-.224	.069	-.162		-.3.260**	1.030	
Degree of education	.011	.010	.066		1.135	1.429	
Employment	.437	.074	.300		5.916***	1.075	
R <sup>2</sup>						.146	
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>						.136	
F						15.260***	

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**4. Conclusions**

Based on the above research results, it proposed the following strategies to ultimately increase life satisfaction by promoting the employment of people with intellectual disabilities.

First, among the control variables, gender and age have a significant effect on life satisfaction, so it will be necessary to select and preferentially support vulnerable groups with low daily life satisfaction considering these characteristics. The elderly male people with intellectual disabilities should be considered the most vulnerable target group and should be supported more preferentially and actively.

Second, since employment is found to be an important factor in increasing the life satisfaction of the intellectually disabled, improvement measures are needed to promote employment of the intellectually disabled. Among the types of disabilities, employers have no choice but to avoid hiring disabled people who lack intellectual ability, and in fact, the employment rate of the intellectually disabled is also very low in the survey on the economic activity of the disabled (Korea Employment Promotion Agency for the Disabled, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to introduce a scheme that provides incentives for employers to hire people with intellectual disabilities. When hiring people with severe intellectual disabilities, it may be possible to reduce the burden of compulsory employment of the disabled or to provide additional subsidies.

Third, as a measure to increase the employment rate of the intellectually disabled, it is also necessary to increase the competitiveness of the intellectually disabled. In the case of intellectual disabilities, most of them lack opportunities to develop vocational skills after graduating from special schools. Continuous education and support to improve the

vocational abilities of intellectually disabled people must be provided at welfare institutes or vocational training institutes for disabled people.

Finally, it is necessary to continue to develop jobs suitable for people with intellectual disabilities. In a rapidly changing social environment, support for research and development of actually employable occupations should be accompanied by considering the characteristics and abilities of the intellectually disabled.

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