

THE PERCEPTION OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION ON THE DISCOURSE SURROUNDING THE ABOLITION OF THE MINISTRY OF GENDER EQUALITY AND FAMILY BY THE ELECTED PRESIDENT OF SOUTH KOREA YOON SEOK YEOL (2022-2027)

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Abstract

Yoon Seok Yeol, the elected president of South Korea for the 2022-2027 term, pledged during his 2022 presidential campaign to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, primarily focusing on the youth, particularly young men. Young men cast their votes for Yoon Seok Yeol's promise to eliminate the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, indicating that the social phenomenon of gender equality in South Korea has been a widely discussed issue for a long time. This research aims to evaluate the perceptions of the younger generations to understand their views on this issue perspectives in South Korea. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method and conducts in-depth observations through interviews with ten informants aged between 18 and 40 years old. The findings suggest that implementing this discourse could adversely affect the policies within this ministry. One of the negative social impacts is the decline in support for programs aimed at addressing the birth rate in South Korea, as well as the decrease in South Korea's economic investment in social work programs.

Keywords: perception, gender, younger generation, South Korea, Yoon Seok Yeol

BACKGROUND

In 1988, during the formation of the new South Korean administration, the President established a special committee to address women's issues. The President established this entity to implement initiatives to improve women's conditions, such as formulating and implementing women's policies and outlawing gender discrimination. (Kim, 2002).

Established in 1998, the institution was deemed inadequate for addressing women's issues. In January 2000, following his election as the eighth President of South Korea, President Kim Dae-Jung highlighted the importance of establishing a Ministry of Gender Equality during his Millennium New Year speech. (Oh, 2008)

President Kim Dae Jung officially inaugurated the Gender Equality Ministry on January 29, 2001, one year after he declared its necessity. Its responsibilities included safeguarding victims of domestic and sexual violence and preventing prostitution, functions that were formerly under the purview of the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

The Ministry of Gender Equality has transitioned from its initial focus on formulating and summarizing women's rights policies to tackling broader issues concerning women. This is exemplified by the creation of entities such as the Women's Human Resource Development Agency, the Elimination of Discrimination for a Gender-Equal Society, and the Prevention of Various Forms of Violence Against Women.

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family is responsible for formulating integrated family

policies and executing functions to coordinate and support family policies from other ministries. In 2008, the Ministry of Welfare and Family Affairs reassigned the responsibilities for family policy and child care to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, thereby focusing the Ministry's attention on women's policies and their rights and interests. (ESCAP, 2005)

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family aims to establish a secure and harmonious society for all demographics, encompassing women, men, youth, and families. It concentrates its endeavors on establishing a secure society where women and youth can coexist peacefully and generate possibilities in public areas for all genders. (Uk, 2007)

In 2021, Lee Jun Seok, a conservative expert and president of the People Power Party, campaigned for the dissolution of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, claiming that it perpetuates harmful misconceptions regarding men. Lee's survey revealed a growing trend, especially among young males of working age, who perceive the Ministry's gender equality as a discriminatory stance that exclusively favors women. (Safitri, 2023)

People perceive Yoon Seok Yeol as having conservative and contentious traits, especially because he promotes anti-feminist views. As a result, Yoon Seok Yeol has earned the reputation of being the Asian counterpart of Donald Trump. Yoon Seok Yeol opposes feminism and has suggested the dissolution of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, which he contends

is a misuse of the public budget. (wsj.com/26 Oktober 2023)

Throughout the campaign, Yoon Seok Yeol engaged with the youth, a significant portion of whom were antagonistic toward feminism. Yoon Seok Yeol asserted that there is "no structural discrimination" against women, despite South Korea's position as the lowest-ranked nation in gender equality among affluent countries. (voanews.com/26 Oktober 2023)

South Korea, a developed nation, experiences a significant incidence of sexual harassment, with 98% of offenders being male and 86% of victims being female, reporting three to four occurrences each hour. (Hutabarat et al., 2023)

Proponents of anti-feminism contend that the government's initiatives to promote gender equality have exhibited an excessive amount of bias against women. Feminists assert that the pervasive sexual assault and harassment in South Korea, which continues to occur frequently, does not constitute a viable response to the escalating sexual crimes. Yoon Seok Yeol intends to alter the penalties for individuals who fraudulently report sexual offenses. (cnn.com/26 Oktober 2023)

Men in South Korea perceive certain laws as burdensome, hindering their career advancement. Mandatory military service, which adult men are required to complete for around two years, is considered a burdensome rule that disrupts their educational and professional pursuits during that period.

The Goryeo Dynasty in the early second millennium established mandatory military duty in South Korea centuries ago. In 1910, the Japanese invasion and occupation of the Korean Peninsula prompted the official enactment of the law. Chapter II, Article 39 (1) of the Republic of Korea's 1948 Constitution, which states, "All citizens must defend the state as prescribed by law," imposes the current conscription law. (Moon, 1998)

People view this as a barrier that prevents men from consistently progressing in their careers. Men assert that the current rule in South Korea, which mandates military duty for males between the ages of 18 and 30, represents a significant injustice. Males view this age period as the ideal time to begin their career development. Consequently, men perceive the existing compulsory military service legislation as a hindrance to their job advancement. Simultaneously, women will retain the opportunity to pursue their professional trajectories without the necessity of fulfilling military obligations. They noted that the prevalent issue at that time was inequality becoming the focal point, and they proposed a solution to mitigate that inequity. (Aminah, 2012)

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive methodology. Bogdan and Taylor assert that a qualitative methodology is a research approach that generates descriptive data through written or spoken language about individuals and observed activities. (Herdiansyah, 2010)

The researcher executed the qualitative descriptive method through in-depth interviews using a purposive sampling methodology, identifying target persons who possessed traits aligned with the study's objectives. (Turner, 2020)

This research began with a document analysis of news stories that featured Yoon Seok Yeol's discourse on the abolition of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family in October 2023. The collection of interview samples followed this.

We performed a purposive sampling on 10 South Korean citizens, aged 18 to 40 years, comprising 5 males and 5 females.

In August 2024, we conducted the interview both in person in Seoul, South Korea, and online using the KakaoTalk application. We conducted data processing and analysis in September 2024.

Table 1. Data Informant

No	Name	Gender	Age	Job	Education
1	Han JM	P	30	Language Pathologist	S2
2	Jo SJ	P	26	Linguist	S2
3	Lee SJ	P	29	Employee	S1
4	Choi SH	P	29	Employee	S1
5	Park SY	P	32	Housewife	S2
6	Lee JH	P	31	Employee	S1

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7	Choi JM	L	34	Engineer	S3
8	Kang JW	L	29	Clinical Trial Researcher	S1
9	Byun SJ	L	29	Employee	S1
10	Jeon JC	L	34	Teacher	S1

RESULT

The interview results indicate that the younger generation in South Korea, particularly in Seoul, possesses limited understanding regarding this topic and exhibits a lack of interest in the prevailing political concerns. Consequently, it produces diverse interpretations on the discourse on the abolition of this ministry. Certain respondents in this study lack a clear and detailed understanding of the performance of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, as well as the rhetoric around its potential removal.

This research subject is exceptionally remarkable. I learned about this issue from you, and I am interested in understanding how you became aware of it. The functions of this Ministry are obscure; only a limited number of individuals are cognizant of its existence. (CJM, 2024)

I am uncertain about the activities of that ministry, and I believe it constitutes a misallocation of taxpayer funds. (LSJ,2024)

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family is perceived as an institution that lacks well delineated work programs concerning equality concerns and predominantly emphasizes women's rights and perspectives.

While they appear to ensure numerous women's rights, there may presently be instances of reverse discrimination against men. This issue engenders gender conflict, as women persistently advocate for their rights to greater comfort, while men initially enjoy all the advantages due to women's perception of their suffering. (LSJ, 2024)

The designation of this ministry in Korean primarily pertains to the term "women" rather than equality. Consequently, for individuals who dissent from feminism, this ministry is inequitable in its approach to the gender disparity in South Korea.

The issue emerges due to the inclusion of "yeosong" (여성), meaning women, in the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (여성가족부). This situation is not comparable, as other ministries, like the Ministry of Environment Hwan Gyeong Bu (환경부), deal not only with environmental issues but also a variety of other concerns. (HJM, 2024)

This institution should operate as a gender equality entity rather than a women-centric organization. Viewing women as

fundamentally weak individuals is problematic, as gender equality incorporates the human rights of both men and women. I assert that this ministry is essential as an institution for gender and family equality. (PSY, 2024)

Numerous sources suggest that the establishment of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family has had a positive impact on the work programs that have been implemented. The Ministry provides support in caring for children with disabilities and assists teachers in explaining gender equality to students with limited cognitive abilities who exclusively rely on social media for information.

As a teacher, I bear significant responsibility for tasks about gender equality. Based on my personal experience, there is little that is exceptional; but, within a community of numerous young men on social media, this promise has emerged as a prominent subject, prompting me to implement the rule and categorize accordingly. (JJC, 2024)

The government's assistance for children with impairments, whom I assist in caring for, comes as a surprise. I see this as a negative trend. (JSJ, 2024)

Adverse perceptions regarding the implementation of this discourse will lead to diminished support for women's rights and representation in the public domain, as well as a reduction in backing for social welfare initiatives, particularly those aimed at addressing South

Korea's low birth rate. This will exacerbate the country's demographic challenges.

For both women and men, marriage and parenthood provide significant challenges in maintaining employment, and re-entering the workforce post-childbirth can be particularly arduous. Not all firms appreciate the marriage and childbirth of their employees. The problem lies in the fact that childbirth remains relatively unobstructed. (HJM, 2024)

The drawback lies in the absence of a significant institution to address prevailing gender equality concerns, such as the income disparity between men and women and the lack of support for caregivers. Furthermore, the dissolution of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family will burden other entities, such as the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the Ministry of Administration and Public Security, with the execution of family and youth policies. (PSY, 2024)

Numerous adverse consequences will ensue with the dissolution of this institution. The state disburses a reduced tax burden to the populace. The budget will provide diminished assistance for low-income individuals and reduced funding for youngsters residing in orphanages. (JSJ,2024)

Men's dominance in senior roles and the entrenched patriarchal culture in South Korea characterize the persistent gender disparity between female and male employees in South Korean corporations.

Observing the individuals who rise to CEO positions in prestigious organizations reveals a predominance of men, suggesting that despite women's extensive tenure in the workforce, they remain marginalized and do not enjoy the same status as their male counterparts. (CJM, 2024)

Young couples and working parents raising children can receive assistance through employment programs offered by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family via the Seoul local government.



Picture 1. Pre-marriage program
Sumber: Personal documentation, 2024

A program designed to educate young couples on wedding planning and post-marital life, while also offering financial assistance.



Picture 2. Pregnant women’s program
Sumer: Personal documentation, 2024

The Seoul municipal government administers a program offering financial assistance to pregnant mothers from conception to delivery. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family also oversees this program.



Picture 3. Working parent program
Sumer: Personal documentation, 2024

Working parents requiring economical daycare during business hours might utilize this program.

The last part of this discussion is about the positive view that will come about if this discussion comes to life. Specifically, taxpayer-funded support for this ministry could be redirected to other ministries that are seen as more clearly helpful for South Korea's progress.

One advantage is that proponents of abolition can allocate the money, which emphasizes women's feminist initiatives, to alternative policies. (PSY, 2024)

We accept the proposal to remove this ministry because the budget continues to fund ineffectively executed programs that solely contribute to social proportionality. (LJH, 2024)

This debate generates a spectrum of perceptions, including both unfavorable and positive views from the younger generation of South Korea. Despite sharing a common cultural foundation, the perspectives of this topic vary. The dissolution of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family necessitates thorough evaluation of current policies that have positively influenced South Korea's progress, which should be enhanced to fulfill the aims of gender equality.

CONCLUSION

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family must initiate a revision of its primary vision and mission concerning gender equality. The first task is to modify the name in Korean to eliminate gender-specific characteristics.

If this rhetoric becomes a reality, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family's initiatives to promote and address gender equality concerns in South Korea will face insufficient societal backing. This will result in a continued decline in support for women, ultimately exacerbating South Korea's demographic challenges.

Investment in social welfare programs will have a diminishing economic impact, and the resurgence of patriarchal norms will further obstruct women's participation in the advancement of South Korea's economy.

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