

Chapter 30

Promoting Active Ageing through Technology Training in Korea

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ABSTRACT

By 2050, people aged 60 and older will comprise 33% of Korea's population, up from about 12% currently. In many occupational sectors, women retire at 55 and men at 60. This rapidly shifting demographic requires a new perspective on retirement and a better image of older persons in Korea. In line with the Active Ageing Framework of the World Health Organization, the Active Ageing Consortium in Asia Pacific (ACAP) advocates for changes to individual practices, social norms, and social policy to support the continued engagement of older adults as active contributors to society in the 21st century. Digital literacy is a critical element of Active Ageing, enhancing participation in today's modes of communication and social connectivity. To promote the concept of Active Ageing with Digital Ageing, Korea's Research Institute of Science for the Better Living of the Elderly (RISBLE) aims to increase Korean elders' access to information and their opportunities for communication and participation. RISBLE's programs—Cyber Family, Internet Navigator, and the 1080 Family Online Game Festival—help elders master new technology, strengthen intergenerational relations, gain leadership roles, and contribute as community teachers. This chapter reviews the Korean situation of ageing, outlines ACAP's commitment to Active Ageing with Digital Ageing, and presents information on three RISBLE programs. These “best practices” are shared in hopes that other communities can learn from RISBLE's work to reduce the ageing digital divide and promote digital life for older persons in South Korea.

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INTRODUCTION

In most countries, people are living longer and with less disability than ever before (Fries, 1980; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007; Wiener & Tilly, 2002). Concurrently, many families are choosing to have fewer children. Both trends are contributing to a worldwide increase in the proportion of older adults (Kinsella & Phillips, 2005; World Health Organization [WHO], 2002).

South Korea has realized significant economic growth since independence (1945) and the Korean War (1950-1953) and is now experiencing rapid population ageing. In fact, by 2050, people aged 60 and older will comprise 33% of Korea's population, up from about 12% currently. This compares to projections of 30% of the European Union population and 21% of the United States (U.S.) population (United Nations, 2002).

If Korea and other rapidly ageing societies are to survive, they need to find ways to tap older adults as social capital. Continued participation in society over the life course is one of the tenets of the Active Ageing Framework of WHO (2002). In an effort to promote Active Ageing in Korea, the Research Institute of Science for the Better Living of the Elderly (RISBLE) in the south-coast city of Busan, works to increase the digital literacy of older adults (<http://www.wellageing.com>).

In this chapter, we review Korea's changing demographics. We present WHO's Active Ageing Framework and the reasons for its appeal in East Asia. We discuss the role of informatization of older persons in Active Ageing and benefits associated with the ability to use digital technology. We then provide information on RISBLE's mission and describe three RISBLE programs that promote digital literacy. Specifically, we will summarize the history, procedures, and successes of RISBLE's Cyber Family Program, Internet Navigator Program, and 1080 Family Online Game Festival. These programs have helped older adults gain leadership roles, establish and strengthen existing intergenerational relations,

and contribute as community teachers. We will conclude with suggestions for future programming and research into digital ageing in Korea.

BACKGROUND

Population Ageing in Korea

South Korea's incredible economic growth in the latter half of the 20th century has contributed to population ageing in this nation. Prior to 1945, Korea was forcibly occupied by Japan, which focused on extracting and exploiting resources. The Korean War (1950-1953) followed closely after independence from Japan, with extensive loss of life and property. Foreign aid helped Korea develop an industrial base, and spectacular economic growth has been fueled by the chemical, shipbuilding, automotive, and electronics industries. Today, South Korea is the 13th largest economy in the world, and per capita GNP exceeds US\$20,000, compared to only US\$100 in 1963 (U.S. Department of State, 2009).

Increases in industrialization, education, and income have been accompanied by improved environmental and healthcare supports, resulting in extended life expectancy (78.6 years in 2005), as well as declining birth rate, which stands now at 1.08 (Korean National Statistics Office, 2009; United Nations, 2002). Population also is shifting as young people leave the countryside for the city or pursue study and work opportunities abroad, resulting in senior populations of 30% or more in some rural areas.

Based on life spans of the past, the current retirement age in many occupational sectors in Korea is 55 for women and 60 for men (United Nations, 2002). Korea's pension system is relatively new. As older adults stay healthier and live longer post-retirement, concerns are being raised about the adequacy of the pension currently provided (Kim, 2000). In fact, many retired older adults in Korea do not have an income. Government and

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