

Analysis of Research Trends related to Women: Focusing on Literature in Korean Journal of Social Welfare, 2009~2017

Hyunjung Lee*

Department of Social Welfare, Baekseok University

여성 관련 연구 동향 분석: 한국사회복지학 게재 연구 (2009~2017)들을 중심으로

이현정*

백석대학교 사회복지학부

Abstract The aim of this study is to provide a direction for future research by examining research trends on women in social welfare field in recent years. This study has theoretical significance in terms of expanding the horizon of social welfare knowledge by accumulating new research results based on previous research results on this topic. Using content analysis, we analyzed 37 studies on women published in Korean Journal of Social Welfare during 2009 ~ 2017 focusing on research subjects, research topics, and methods. The results of analyzing the research subjects indicated that women were described as client, family, and worker. In terms of the research topics, the results revealed a total of thirteen themes. In addition, the results showed that empirical research methods were dominant. It is suggested that more efforts should be made in future studies to broaden the scope of research subjects, topics, and methodologies in this filed.

Key Words : Women, Feminism, Social work, Research trends, Content analysis

요약 본 연구의 목적은 최근 한국 사회복지 분야의 여성 관련 연구 동향을 고찰함으로써 향후 연구를 위한 방향을 제공하는 데 있다. 본 연구는 본 주제에 관한 선행 연구 결과를 기반으로 새로운 연구 결과들을 축적함으로써 사회복지 지식의 지평을 넓히는 차원에서 이론적 중요성을 갖는다. 내용 분석을 사용하여 2009~2017년 한국사회복지학에 게재된 여성 관련 논문 37편들을 연구 대상, 연구 주제와 연구 방법들을 중심으로 분석하였다. 연구 대상에 관한 분석 결과, 여성에 관한 사회복지 연구에서 여성은 클라이언트, 가족과 근로자로서 재현되고 있는 것으로 나타났다. 연구 주제를 분석한 결과 다음과 같은 총 13개의 주제들이 도출되었다: 가족과 가정, 사회적응, 트라우마 관련, 노동, 사회복지 서비스 관련, 사회/지역사회 참여, 프로그램 또는 척도 개발, 자립, 결혼 관련, 젠더 차이, 젠더, 양성 평등 및 기타. 또한 연구 방법론 측면에서는 실증적 연구 방법론이 대다수로 나타났다. 향후 연구에서는 연구 대상, 주제 및 방법론에 있어 범위를 넓히기 위한 학문적 노력이 필요하다고 하겠다.

키워드 : 여성, 페미니즘, 사회복지, 연구 동향, 내용 분석

1. Introduction

Social work is acknowledged as a woman's

profession in that the overwhelming majority of social workers are women and clients they serve are mostly women. Social work and feminism are also viewed as

having relationship because both of them share certain beliefs including a commitment to the value of worth and dignity of all persons and to equality of opportunity. As a way to approach these values, both social work and feminism place emphasis on such agendas as challenging oppression and re-conceptualizing power within a society[1]. In this context, it is naturally expected that social work profession addresses women's issues and such aforementioned agendas to great extent. However, research on women's issues has not been actively of interest in social work field than expected and feminism has not been sufficiently reflected in literature. In addition, research attempt to explore issues and trends of women's literature in the field of social work has been scarce[1]. Although several previous studies as early as 1970s began to review professional literature for its coverage of women's issues, there is still a paucity of research.

One way to gauge commitment of profession to a certain issue would be to examine literature of the professional field. In the similar vein, examining social work literature on women's issues provides an avenue to estimate social work profession's commitment to improving lives of women. Moreover, it enables us to observe how the literature approaches women's issues. For these reasons, it would be worthwhile to examine issues and trends of literature dealing with women. This research effort would be particularly meaningful in Korean social work field because the culture of patriarchy and Confucianism still exist in Korean society. With the influence of this culture in Korean society, women generally face discrimination in various aspects of their lives. Investigation of Korean social work literature would demonstrate how social work profession in Korea has been responsive to the issues of women and provide directions for future academic effort.

2. Related Studies

In the field of social work in Korea, women have

been of research interest and research attempt has been made to explore subjects related to this population. However, little research has been devoted to provide overview of research on women in this academic area. In fact, only one study was conducted for this purpose[2]. examined articles on women from 1984 to 2009 to examine research trends. The articles in this study were chosen from Korean Journal of Social Welfare because the journal is one of the typical journals representing main academic subjects and discussion in Korean social work field.

Based on the analysis of 124 articles, results of the Sung et al.'s study revealed that largest theme of the articles reviewed was child rearing and care-giving for family members[2]. Poverty was the second most frequently occurring theme and gender equality and trauma-related themes appeared next. Such themes as social adaptation, rehabilitation from deviation, recovery from disease, differences in perception according to gender, work and wage, marriage/divorce/remarriage, and welfare policy or practice for women were discussed in these articles. With regard to identity/role of women described through literature, results of the study demonstrated that women's identities or roles were mostly described within family domain and 44.4% of the articles portrayed women this way. That is, women were mainly described as mother-caregiver, wife, care-giver for elderly/patient family member, or householder. On the other hand, portion of the articles portraying women as independent individual beings was relatively small (29.9%). This study concluded that social work literature tends to describe women in terms of traditional female identities and approach women's issues with perspective conceptualizing women as beings who are dependent and vulnerable. This study suggested need for extending scope of research in terms of research topics or methods. More importantly, this study contested that future social work research on women approach women's issues from macro or feminist perspectives. That is, future research should move from one simply exploring 'realities' of 'women

as sexual beings' to research analyzing 'social mechanisms' producing oppression and discrimination over women.

Research effort to extend current knowledge by analyzing more recent issues and trends of research on women has value at this time because it would capture how social work literature has responded to issues of this population and add further research insights and potentially form the basis for practice.

3. Methodology

The aim of this study is to extend previous research findings by analyzing more recent issues and research trends of women in the field of social work in Korea. Specifically, referring to category of the aforementioned previous study covering the same topic[2], this study raises the following questions: Who were research subjects? What topics were frequently discussed? And which analytical methods did authors of the literature use?

For this purpose, this study reviewed domestic journal articles that are published in Korean Journal of Social Welfare. The time period for selection of articles was set from 2009 to current in this study because this study is a trial to extend previous research findings by updating overview of research trends of women since then. In order to search articles on women, such words as "women", "wife", "mother", "single mother", "spouse", and "family caregiver" were entered as key words.

As research method, content analysis was used for classifying articles selected for review. The content analysis method has been viewed as an objective and systematic way to categorize and describe materials for the purpose of investigating general trends in literature. As a result, these articles were analyzed according to research subjects, research topics, and research methods used.

4. Study Results

A total of 37 articles were found through computerized searches. Drawing on content analysis, results of analysis are presented according to research subjects, research topics, and research methods used in the following.

4.1 Subjects of Research

Research subjects demonstrated in the articles reviewed were analyzed and specifically, the analysis was concerned about how the articles portrayed identities or roles of women. For some of the articles, research subjects were not clearly identified and thus grouping was not appropriate. Thus, this analysis was performed only for articles which contained enough information on research subjects and total of 26 articles were finally selected for the analysis. The analysis showed that women's identities/roles were grouped into three categories: client, family, and worker. Table 1 demonstrates results of analysis on subjects of research.

Table 1. Subject of Research

Category	Number of articles
Client	11
Family	10
Worker	5
Total	26

First of all, of these categories, identity as client who has various needs appeared the most across the articles reviewed. Within the client category (n = 11), the articles identified women as trauma (including various kinds of violence) victims (n = 5), social work service recipient (n = 4), or mental health patient (n = 2).

Second, results of the analysis showed that women were described based on family-related identity. Within the family category (n = 10), much work focused on women's identities as caregiver for children (n = 7) or family members other than children (n = 1). Identity as wife was also research interest in 2 articles.

Lastly, women were depicted as worker in 5 articles. Women across these articles were workers working in various types of work-related settings including labor market.

4.2 Research Topics

Table 2 shows results of analysis of research topics. According to the analysis, 13 themes were found: family and home, adaptation to society, trauma-related issues, work/employment, social welfare service-related issues, social/community involvement, inventing program or scale, self-sufficiency, marriage-related issues, differences according to gender, discussing gender, gender equality, and others. Themes fell into others were related to exploring life history and experiences of a woman drawing on autobiographical-narrative approach. Of these categories, the theme of family and home was the most frequently appeared across the studies.

Table 2. Research Topics

Topics	No. of articles
Family and home	9
Adaptation to society	4
Trauma-related	4
Work/employment	3
Welfare service-related	3
Social/community involvement	3
Inventing program/scale	2
Self-sufficiency	2
Marriage-related	1
Differences according to gender	1
Gender equality	1
Discussing gender	1
Others	3
Total	37

First, family and home was the largest theme and it represents 24.3% (n = 9) of all the studies. The theme of family and home could be classified into three subthemes: child-rearing, caregiving for family members other than children, and others. Of these subthemes, the theme related to child-rearing appeared the most (n =7). For example, Kim et al[3]. examined

child-rearing experiences drawing on qualitative approach. They explored live experiences of foster mothers who adopted disabled children and results of the study provided in-depth understanding of how the motherhood and child-rearing were like from perspectives of these women as mothers. Other studies examined some aspects of child-rearing experiences and quantitative approach was mostly adopted in these studies. Sub-themes included relationship of child-rearing stress to certain factors (e.g., psychological well-being of mother, level of parental satisfaction) and factors affecting parenting (e.g., impact of social capital, community child-care environment, maternal psychological factors). The sub-theme of caregiving for family members other than children appeared in 1 study. Choi and Sim examined how parental care burden affected labor force participation of middle aged and older women[4]. The sub-theme categorized into others dealt with effect of social capital on the level of satisfaction with family relationship among married immigrant women[5].

Second, adaptation to society (n = 4, 10.8%) and trauma-related issues (n = 4, 10.8%) were the second most frequently occurring theme. With regard to the theme dealing with adapting to society, such topics as social readjustment experience of military widows and acculturation of immigrant women were focused. Some studies focused on acculturative stress of marriage-based immigrant women. For instance, Kwon examined effects of Korean ability and self-esteem on the acculturative stress and Shi et al[6,7]. conducted a meta-analysis of variables related to acculturative stress for this population. Regarding trauma-related issues, such topics as domestic violence, alcohol problems, and sexual abuse were studied.

Third, work/employment (n = 3, 8.1%), social welfare service-related issues (n = 3, 8.1%), and social/community involvement (n = 3, 8.1%) were the third most occurring research theme in this study. Within the employment/work category, majority of studies investigated working experience of poor

female-headed families and marriage immigrant women in social enterprise with a purpose to deeply exploring experiences of these women from their perspectives[8,9]. Some study examined relationship between employment status and mental health among marriage immigrant women[10]. With regard to social welfare service-related category, large body of literature examined how social welfare service (e.g., utilization of multicultural family support services, childcare subsidy) influenced some aspects of women's lives (e.g., marital well-being, time allocation). Within the social/community involvement category, topics related to social networks, community participation, and relationship between mentoring network and empowerment were the focus of the studies reviewed. For example, Lee conducted qualitative research to explore community participation experiences of married immigrant women in rural areas[11].

Fourth, inventing program/scale (n = 2, 5.4%) and self-sufficiency (n = 2, 5.4%) were the fourth most occurring themes. The inventing program/scale included studies about developing and testing effects of a group program for low income depressed elderly and developing a scale for self-sufficiency process for female victims of prostitution. Studies fell into the self-sufficiency theme mostly cover self-sufficiency drawing on qualitative research approach. For example, Chong tried to reconstruct experience of single mothers in poverty with focus on meaning of self-sufficiency, welfare dependency, and work[12].

Fifth, there were some studies focusing on marriage-related (n = 1, 2.7%), differences according to gender (n = 1, 2.7%), gender equality (n = 1, 2.7%), or discussing gender (n = 1, 2.7%). Gender-related studies covered the compatibility of work and family, analysis of construction process of gender, and decomposition of gender differences on the poverty.

Sixth, total of 3 studies fell into others category and these studies covered such themes as exploring life experiences of a woman and discussing feminist epistemology for knowledge production. For instance,

Sung et al[2]. analyzed the way of knowledge production in social welfare and discussed feminist epistemology to this academic field. This study examined the meanings of feminist epistemology and its implications to research and practice to social work field.

4.3 Research Methods

The final goal of the study is to investigate research methods. Drawing on Nichols-Casebolt et al.'s work[1], each of the articles reviewed was classified as two categories: empirical and non-empirical. Empirical article involves collecting and analyzing data or using secondary data analysis. The empirical research method can be grouped into three subcategories: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method. The non-empirical research method does not involve generation or analysis of any new data collected by the authors, although it may include findings obtained from other studies. The non-empirical research can be conceptual, theoretical, or practical. Table 3 demonstrates results of analysis on research methods.

Table 3. Research Methods

Research methods		Number of articles
Empirical	Quantitative	22
	Qualitative	14
	Mixed-method	1
Total		37
Non-empirical		None
Total		37

The results indicated that majority of the studies used empirical research methods. In fact, empirical research methods were adopted in all of the 37 articles and there was no article using non-empirical research methods. Specifically, of the 37 empirical articles in the current study, quantitative methods represented 59.5% (n = 22) and qualitative methods accounted for 37.8% (n = 14) of these empirical articles. Mixed-method was adopted in 1 article (2.7%).

5. Conclusion

As an extension of the previous research, this study reviewed articles on women in the social work field in Korea with a purpose to identify more recent research trends. Some issues were emerged as results and they can provide implications for the direction of future research in the following.

First, although the studies reviewed have attempted to cover various themes, future research would benefit from extending the scope of research topics. Results of the study indicated that compared to the previous aforementioned Sung et al.'s study, largest topic of the articles was still related to family and/or home. That is, such themes as child rearing and caregiving for family members appeared the most and articles covering these themes focused on difficulties, meanings of performing this task, or strategies of women to cope with hardships due to doing their roles as care-givers. These studies are scholarly meaningful in that they uncover and address women's realities and their experiences. However, approaching women's issues mostly within family domain results in missing other valuable topics in this inquiry. More importantly, it results in limiting perceptions on women's roles or identities as secondary beings within family. Given that literature is an avenue to demonstrate a profession's commitment to a certain issue and population of interest, future research needs to explore more diverse research topics. For example, orientation of research needs to depart from describing women as traditional female identities and focus on depicting women as independent individual beings (e.g., women as workers). Research effort as such would add further insight into the current state of knowledge.

Lastly, analysis of this study revealed that feminist content is still lacking. Committing to women's issues in social work inquiry has its academic and practical meaning because it make women visible. However, making visible is not sufficient if the assumptions are based on sexism. For example, exploring the issue of discrimination against women plays a role of

demonstrating women's realities they face in society. However, approaching this issue without considering such feminism issues as power difference, patriarchal ideology, and social mechanism results in conceptualizing women as victims or those dependent. Discussing women's issues from feminist perspectives would enable us to see how macro-related features affect women's lives and provide new ways of conceptualizing and solving women's issues.

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저 자 소 개

이 현 정(Hyunjung Lee)

[정회원]



- 1999년 12월 : 미 일리노이 주립대학교 사회사업학 (사회사업학 석사)
- 2007년 12월 : 미 일리노이 주립대학교 사회사업학 (사회사업학 박사)

▪ 2009년 3월 ~ 현재 : 백석대학교 사회복지학부 조교수
<관심분야> : 여성복지, 다문화