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## A Study on Causes of Elderly CRIMES in KOREA and Countermeasures

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### Abstract

*The problem of the elderly is an issue that many people do not recognize among social problems caused by aging. In Korea, the damage caused by elderly crimes has increased every year since 1995. These elderly crimes are occurring commonly not only in Korea but also in other countries worldwide. More seriously, elderly crimes are increasing steadily at the same time as violent crimes such as murder, larceny, arson, assault, bodily harm, etc. Most of the elderly crimes were motivated primarily for survival and livelihood previously, but in recent years, the crimes committed by the elderly have increasingly fallen into the category of the major 5 crimes. The incidence and proportion of elderly crimes have been increasing steadily over time. In addition, some incidents of crimes perpetrated by the elderly population are indescribably horrendous, compared to those of the past, and therefore, thorough countermeasures would need to be mapped out.*

*There has been a growing importance of practical research, such as the research into characteristics of elderly crime, factors inducing elderly crimes, and policies for prevention of elderly crime, etc., from the standpoint of criminology in respect of crimes committed by the elderly population in Korea. Thus, it would be important to analyze the characteristics of elderly crimes committed recently in Korea based on various statistical data and literature related to elderly crimes, and based on that, to identify the causes of skyrocketing elderly crimes and establish countermeasures. With the increase in the relative ratio of elderly crimes and elderly population, it is expected that elderly crimes would be highlighted as a serious social problem when the baby boomers join the ranks of elderly population in the period ahead. Therefore, this study was intended to investigate current status and causes of the elderly crimes in Korea, which actually occurred or were likely to occur in Korea in the period ahead and to seek countermeasures.*

*Thus, the study can consider the following policy proposals for achieving a society without elderly crimes. First, it would be necessary to promote a shift in the awareness of the public towards elderly crimes. Second, it is necessary to promote and strengthen role-sharing among social welfare organizations. Third, it is necessary to create a pool of professional manpower for prevention of elderly crimes. Efficient countermeasures would need to be taken against elderly crimes by securing professionals specialized in prevention of elderly crimes in order to accommodate the aging and environmental changes. Fourth, elderly crime control system would need to be established by criminal justice organizations. Elderly crimes are accidents that occur in communities and require cooperation with concerned local authorities and organizations.*

**[Keywords]** *Elderly Crime, Aging Society, Economic Poverty, Elder Crime Prevention, Social Alienation*

### 1. Introduction

The problem of the elderly is an issue that many people do not recognize among social problems caused by aging.

In Korea, the damage caused by elderly crimes has increased every year since 1995.

These elderly crimes are occurring commonly not only in Korea but also in other

countries worldwide. More seriously, elderly crimes are increasing steadily at the same time as violent crimes such as murder, larceny, arson, assault, bodily harm, etc. Amid rapid aging, the elderly may be likely to change from victims to perpetrators.

Most of the elderly crimes were motivated primarily for survival and livelihood previously, but in recent years, the crimes committed by the elderly have increasingly fallen into the category of the major 5 crimes.

The incidence and proportion of elderly crimes have been increasing steadily over time. In addition, some incidents of crimes perpetrated by the elderly population are indescribably horrendous, compared to those of the past, and therefore, thorough countermeasures would need to be mapped out.

Recognizing the seriousness of these problems, OECD member countries, including the United States, have been steadily proceeding with research into elderly crimes since 1980s. By Contrast, only basic reports have been presented in Korea on number of cases involving the elderly crimes, ratio of elderly crimes, etc., while overall problems associated with elderly crimes have been neglected. In other words, there have not been many in-depth studies in Korea which investigated current status of elderly crime and offenses committed by the elderly population[1][2].

Under those circumstances, there has been a growing importance of practical research, such as the research into characteristics of elderly crime, factors inducing elderly crimes, and polices for prevention of elderly crime, etc., from the standpoint of criminology in respect of crimes committed by the elderly population in Korea.

Thus, it would be important to analyze the characteristics of elderly crimes committed recently in Korea based on various statistical data and literature related to elderly crimes, and based on that, to identify the causes of skyrocketing elderly crimes and establish countermeasures.

Therefore, this study was intended to investigate current status and causes of the elderly crimes in Korea, which actually occurred or were likely to occur in Korea in the period ahead and to seek countermeasures.

## **2. Theoretical Consideration of Elderly Crimes**

### **2.1. Trends of elderly crimes**

The concept of the elderly was defined in various ways, but is generally defined as “persons undergoing degradation of physical activities due to changes in psychological, physiological and socio-environment in the aging process over time”

In the conceptualization of elderly crime, elderly crime was defined as the involvement in criminal activities by the persons at the stage of physical degeneration through complex processes in breach of laws[3].

Regarding the trends of elderly crimes in Korea, the number of elderly offenders aged 65 and older stood at 77,125 which accounted for only 3.3% of total offenders in 2008, but rose to 89,648, comprising 4.6% of total criminals, in 2014.

According to “2015 Crime Analysis”, a data published by the National Police Agency, elderly crimes caused “accidentally” reached 19.4%(10,557 cases) out of 54,373 cases, excluding 40,999 cases with unidentified motives, among 95,372 cases of crimes committed by elderly population in connection with motives of crimes in 2014[4][5].

### **2.2. Major characteristics of elderly crimes**

The characteristics of elderly crimes are classified into physical characteristics, psychological characteristics, financial characteristics, and social characteristics[6]. First, elderly crimes exhibit physical characteristics.

As a result of physical changes, the elderly show weak self-confidence, more fear and hypersensitivity reaction, and furthermore, insensibility to external stimulus, which increases the probability of crimes.

Second, elderly crimes exhibit psychological characteristics. Their brain sensory functions are compromised by mental stress caused by the death of spouse, the death of friends and acquaintances, poverty, and isolation from family, etc.

Those symptoms are manifested in the form of crime such as alcoholism, etc., or suicide.

Third, elderly crimes exhibit financial characteristics. Most of the elderly stop working due to aging and lose the ability to earn money, which often leads to the loss of income and poverty.

The types of crimes attributable to financial characteristics of the elderly crime are mainly larceny, fraud, embezzlement, malpractice, which fall under the category of crimes for survival and livelihood[7][8].

Fourth, elderly crimes exhibit social characteristics. Elderly people lose their social status and functions, and consequently, experience the vanishing sense of existence towards their roles, and sometimes commit crimes to express social dissatisfaction[9].

### **3. Analyses on Causes and Current Status of Elderly Crimes**

#### **3.1. Lack of job opportunities for the elderly**

With the advancement of science, production technology has been improved, and a large part of production has been replaced by automation systems. By contrast, the number of workers required to provide simple labor has decreased.

Although the diversity of jobs has increased as a result, competition has been induced in areas requiring the labor. Elderly people, who have become physically and emotionally depressed, have fallen behind competition and find a decline in the number of jobs available to them.

Furthermore, age limitation at production sites has led to the loss of job roles and activities of the elderly. The problem is that most of the elderly people who has lost the

ability to work for survival and livelihood will face serious secondary ramifications such as family breakdown[10].

#### **3.2. Financial poverty of the elderly**

Korea has already entered the era of aging society and is expected to emerge as an ultra-aged society in the early 2030s, but financial poverty of the elderly is considerably more serious than that of the elderly in OECD member countries.

The reason behind the poverty of the elderly in Korea, which is more serious in comparison to that of the elderly in other countries, is that the elderly who have been traditionally supported by the family are confronted with a situation in which they live as independent households amid the change in family type.

In other words, the elderly who do not have economic means are more likely to fall into economic poverty. In Korea, the rate of poverty is higher particularly in elderly women than their male counterparts.

The primary reason for financial poverty facing the elderly is that they lost the regular income sources and that their sources of income are replaced with retirement benefits, pensions, savings, and property revenues as a result[11][12].

#### **3.3. Social isolation and loneliness of the elderly**

Korea needs to pay special attention to the issues of the elderly amid rapid aging of the society and efforts need to be made to resolve problems facing the elderly population. Such endeavor is for mitigating the social problem that most elderly people feel alienated from the society due to socio-psychological conflict.

The main reason contributing to such social problem is the gap in the value and difference in education level among generations, degraded status of the elderly, transformation of the family form into nuclear family-based family, and consequently, a considerable number of the elderly suffer from loneliness and psychological alienation from their families[13].

The most serious malady arising from social exclusion of the elderly is the increase in the rate of suicide among the elderly.

#### 4. Discussion & Conclusion

With the increase in the relative ratio of elderly crimes and elderly population, it is expected that elderly crimes would be highlighted as a serious social problem when the baby boomers join the ranks of elderly population in the period ahead.

Thus, the study can consider the following policy proposals for achieving a society without elderly crimes.

First, it would be necessary to promote a shift in the awareness of the public towards elderly crimes. In other words, the priority would need to be given to raising up elderly crime as a social issue, increasing the awareness of the public towards the seriousness of elderly crimes, and resolving and coping with elderly crimes based on common interest.

For a uniform awareness towards in mapping up policies to tackle elderly crimes, concerned organizations, academic circles and researchers should work closely together and take a unified stand against elderly crimes.

In addition, measures should be devised to raise attention of the public towards elderly crimes and resolve them practically.

Second, it is necessary to promote and strengthen role-sharing among social welfare organizations. For prevention of crime and recidivism, it would be important to secure background information on elderly ground and check criminal history and subsequently provide counseling and treatment to elderly offenders through social workers or criminal counselors affiliated with private-sector organizations.

Third, it is necessary to create a pool of professional manpower for prevention of elderly crimes. Efficient countermeasures would need to be taken against elderly crimes by securing professionals specialized in prevention of elderly crimes in order to

accommodate the aging and environmental changes. In other words, it is urgent to develop educational institutions and programs to train 'elderly crime prevention experts'.

Fourth, elderly crime control system would need to be established by criminal justice organizations. Elderly crimes are accidents that occur in communities and require cooperation with concerned local authorities and organizations. In other words, it is necessary to build a council-type elderly crime control system in order to ensure that comprehensive countermeasures can be established by social institutions, such as social welfare organizations, educational institutions, enterprises, NGOs, police and prosecutors, etc., against elderly crimes as well as governmental organizations.

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