

Study on Suicide Research Trends in Korean Elderly through Key Words

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze suicide trends of elderly people in Korea in order to reduce the suicide rate among them and better prepare for a super aged society. The data was collected from 194 Korean academic papers sought out through the key word "suicide of the elderly" which were selected from 426 papers published in Korea from 1991 to 2014. As a result, research on suicide among the elderly has been gradually increasing over time, and the proportion of those using surveys was high. The most common areas of research were welfare and psychological factors, which were the highest factors in suicide.

In conclusion, it is necessary to find a positive and active plan to maintain a psychologically healthy old age in preparation for a super aged Korean society, and to carry out integrated welfare studies for the elderly in order to develop a detailed policy for each elderly person to support the alienated elderly. Welfare research should be carried out in a variety of ways.

Keywords: *Super aged, Suicide rate, Keyword, Integrated, Elderly welfare*

1. Introduction

The rate of progress from aging to a super aged society in Korea is the fastest in the world. Thus, the social concern of our country is concentrated on the rapidly increasing number of elderly people, and prevention and solutions for various problems of elderly people are emerging as social tasks of a national level.

According to the OECD Health Data from 2014, Korea's suicide rate ranked number one, the highest among all 33 member countries. Thus, Korea has become a disgrace with the top suicide rate for 10 consecutive years since 2003 among OECD member countries [1]. The rate of elderly suicide in Korea is 69.8 people per 100,000 in 2012, which is 2.5 times higher than the rate of suicide for the 15-64 age group, 27.4 people. For people in their 60s, it was 42.8 people, 70s, 74.4 people and 80s, 103.8 persons [2], the higher the age, the higher the number. Especially, those who were over 80 years old, the super aged group, showed a significantly high rate. Although people are getting more aware of suicide as a global issue, not limited to a particular area [3], it is a national problem that Korea needs to resolve urgently.

Even though the research on suicide in the elderly is a very important subject in the aging and realization of welfare era, only the problems were addressed in each field, lacking a variety of solutions and interdisciplinary [4].

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Suicide is the ultimate reaction to helplessness [5]. It is an act that occurs because of the belief that there is no future and no reason to live. Despite the fact that suicide has different characteristics according to age, there are not many studies on suicide in the elderly. This is because there is a sense of discrimination against the elderly, and there is a social tendency to conceal the debate about the suicide of the elderly because it is against traditional thoughts such as showing respect to old people. In our society, the death or suicide of a youth is considered sad but the suicide of the elderly is perceived as the death of the elderly whose life is over.

However, the rapid social and economic changes due to the aging of the population are too great for the elderly to experience and adapt. Also, the scale of current changes is too great and the contents are diverse. In Korea, where the economic and social infrastructure and system to cope with the aging society are poor, the unstable situation of society has a negative influence on the elderly and eventually leads to their suicide [6]. Therefore, the search for social solutions to the suicide of the elderly is our society's task as it is rapidly aging. In order to do that, systematic research on the suicide of elderly people is essential and it is very important to analyze the actual cause of elderly suicide.

Therefore, it is necessary to examine the factors of suicide based on the various characteristics of the elderly to develop a detailed program and make a differentiated approach in order to establish an effective suicide prevention and intervention strategy for the elderly in Korea, where the elderly population and the elderly suicide rate are continuously increasing.

Therefore, this study analyzed the research papers on the suicide of the elderly in Korea published so far to examine the trends of elderly suicide and provide basic data for finding active and new social solutions for prevention and coping, so we can resolve loneliness and restore positivity for a happy older life, the final period of life.

2. Method

The purpose of this study is to prepare for the future of a super aged Korean society and present basic data for national social solutions in order to prevent the suicide of the elderly and to establish coping strategies by examining, comparing and analyzing the studies and trends related to elderly suicide in Korea.

The study analyzed the suicide related research of elderly suicide focused on academic papers conducted in Korea from 1991, when the elderly suicide study was first published in domestic journals to 2014 in order to identify the research trends of elderly suicide.

The internet scholarly information sites that are frequently searched for journals and theses, Research Information Sharing Service (Korea Education and Research Information Service), Korean Studies Information Service System, and National Assembly Library DB, were used in order to select research materials. A total of 426 academic papers were searched through these and 194 papers related to elderly suicide were selected for this study.

3. Results

A total of 194 papers related to elderly suicide were published in domestic journals from 1991 to 2014. In Korea, there were 7 papers from 1991 ~ 2000, the beginning stage where elderly suicide was searched, and 14 papers from 2001 ~ 2005, 84 papers

from 2006 ~ 2010, and 89 papers from 2011 ~ 2014, which showed that studies on suicide in the elderly gradually increased more actively as time passed.

In addition, among the research on elderly suicide, the most widely used research method was the survey of 109 (58.3%), followed by literature review and secondary data analysis, 29 (15.5 %) and 27 (14.4%), respectively.

Psychological factors were the most frequent influencing factor to elderly suicide in the research papers, with 196 papers (35.3%), followed by social environmental factors in 136 papers (24.5%).

Table 1. Period for publication of academic papers

Year	Number of papers	Percentage (%)
1994	1	0.5%
1996	1	0.5%
1998	1	0.5%
2000	4	2.1%
2001	2	1.0%
2002	2	1.0%
2003	0	0%
2004	4	2.1%
2005	6	3.1%
2006	9	4.6%
2007	9	4.6%
2008	19	9.8%
2009	18	9.3%
2010	29	14.9%
2011	19	9.8%
2012	22	11.3%
2013	37	19.1%
2014	11	5.7%
Total	194	100%

Table 2. Suicide factor

Factor	Number of papers by time of publication				Total	Percentage
	1980~1990	1991~2000	2001~2010	2011~2014		
Psychological factor	0	2	105	89	196	35.3%
Biomedical factor	0	2	29	64	95	17.1%
Life experience and demographic characteristics	0	10	38	81	129	23.2%
Social environmental factor	0	4	50	82	136	24.5%
Total	0	18	222	316	556	100%

Table 3. Journal type

Type	Number of papers by time of publication				Total	Percentage
	1980~1990	1991~2000	2001~2010	211~2014		
General paper	0	6	77	73	156	80.4%
Research grant paper	0	1	21	16	38	19.6%
Total	0	7	98	89	194	100%

4. Conclusion and suggestion

This study analyzed the research trends of elderly suicide conducted in Korea to provide basic data on the development of policy support for an aged society and the activation direction of the elderly suicide strategy study in order to prepare for the super aged Korean society in the future and establish a positive and active life culture in old age to prevent and intervene regarding suicide.

In conclusion, the suicide-related studies of the elderly have been actively carried out gradually, and the number of papers has been increasing, and the survey and literature review methods were the most frequent. Most of the research was conducted in the field of welfare, and psychological factors and social environmental factors were the dominant factors.

Therefore, based on the results of this study, the following suggestions are proposed. In the existing study, most of the studies on elderly suicide focused on the microscopic perspective, i.e., the characteristics of the individual elderly person and the causes of suicide in the surrounding environment. However, there is a need for societal research on macroscopic social and environmental factors in the study of elderly suicide in the future and we should be actively interested in finding solutions to various psychological problems in a complex and rapidly changing society.

Most studies have outlined policy proposals for the prevention of elderly suicide and most studies have a tendency to make policy proposals based on secondary prevention [7]. Thus, there are relatively few proposals for the primary prevention of the elderly and tertiary prevention for those who already attempted suicide or the affected family members. Therefore, it is necessary to activate the research on the process and experience of the person who attempted suicide, and determine concrete strategies to prevent the suicide of the elderly. It is necessary to examine the macroscopic factors of elderly suicide more actively in order to clarify the overall factors of elderly suicide. Most studies use quantitative research methods, but the qualitative methods should be combined and more in-depth studies on suicide in the elderly should be conducted. A follow up study is planned to be designed to examine the effectiveness of the suicide prevention programs through experiment design and to study the development and evaluation of preventive programs.

More active social support and policy support of the elderly is urgently needed in order to prevent elderly suicide and it is necessary to develop a program to reduce the elderly's depression, negative emotions, and worries about the present and the future [8]. It is necessary for the government as well as all people to take more active interests and actions to prepare various utilization plans for a social support system that has higher contact with the elderly in order to intensively intervene on behalf of the elderly with high risk of suicide.

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