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A Study on the Correlation between Social Class and Life Satisfaction Perceived by the Korean Elderly

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze the effects of subjective class consciousness on life satisfaction. This research aimed to not only analyze the relative explanatory power, but also the influence of satisfaction of life within the socioeconomic status where the elderly consider themselves to be an integral part. The elderly's satisfaction in life was analyzed in comparison with demographic characteristics such as gender and age. The correlations of objective socioeconomic characteristics such as income level and education level were also observed. For this purpose, the Korea Labor Panel 17th data (2014) was used to conduct a one-way batch distribution analysis and a hierarchical regression analysis. It was seen that there was a correlation in the Korean elderly in terms of class consciousness and life satisfaction. The elderly with a lower subjective class consciousness showed lower life satisfaction. The relative influences were stronger than the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the elderly, and the explanatory power was much higher than the objective income levels. These results show that the subjective perception of their socioeconomic status has a significant influence on the level of life satisfaction of the Korean elderly, independent of the objective income level.

Keywords : Elderly, Life Satisfaction, Subjective Class Consciousness, Demographic Characteristics, Socioeconomic Characteristics

JEL Classification Code: I00, I30, I31

1. Introduction

In Korea, as the aging population progresses rapidly, the problem of the elderly is emerging. The suicide and poverty rate for the elderly are among the highest compared to the other OECD countries. As of 2016, the suicide rate of the elderly aged 65 and over was 54.8 per 100,000 people, the highest among the OECD member countries since 2009. The suicide rate of the elderly is high, reaching 3.2 times the average of member countries (OECD, 2017). Also, the relative poverty rate of the elderly is 46.7%, which is also the highest among the OECD member countries (Yoon & Kim, 2008). The satisfaction level of the Korean elderly is very low, and the loneliness and depression of the elderly is

a serious problem that needs to be addressed. The percentage of respondents who were satisfied with their lives fell in their 20s (75.6%), 30s (73.3%), 40s (69.0%), 50s (63.6%), and 60s (59.4%). This is in contrast to other developed countries, where life satisfaction is lowered in their 40s and 50s, and then rises again in old age, indicating that the psychological well-being of the Korean elderly is at an all-time low (Kim et al., 2016). In this situation, raising the satisfaction and quality of life for the elderly population is emerging as an important task.

Subjective Social Status (SSS) is drawing attention as an important determinant of mental and physical well-being. The lower the perceived subjective class, the more stressed and vulnerable the disease appears. Subjective hierarchy is strongly associated with various physical and mental health indicators, including depression, subjective health, chronic disease and hypertension (Adler et al., 2008; Franzini & Fernandez-Escquer, 2006; Ghaed & Gallo, 2007; Hu et al., 2005). The correlation between subjective class consciousness and various health indicators persists after accounting for traditional socio-economic status, such as education, income and occupation, and sometimes predicts health outcomes more robustly and strongly than

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objective socioeconomic statuses (Adler et al., 2008; Singh et al., 2005). Awareness of relative positions in the social hierarchy determines whether the need for recognition is met. Therefore, subjective class consciousness is reported to be associated with mental health.

This phenomenon can be explained by the social comparison theory. According to the theory of social comparison, an individual evaluates his situation by comparing himself with a plurality of reference groups with various motives (Jang, 2009; Ryu, 2015). American economist Easterlin had earlier concluded that relative incomes compared to others, rather than absolute increases or decreases, are more important to happiness (Easterlin, 1974). Based on this pioneering research, studies have steadily accumulated showing it is very important for the subjective quality of life that the individual sets the reference group through social comparison. Individuals make comparisons based on those who are superior to, similar to, or lacking in their own population, and often compare themselves with their neighbors and acquaintances in common areas, peers of similar education and occupations, and the ideals of the media (Fernandez & Kulik, 1981; Ferrer-i-Carbonell, 2005; Luttmer, 2005; Kang, 2010; Lee & Hong, 2012).

Among them, those who have a high standard and also underestimate their own standard of living have relatively low subjective happiness (Clark & Senik, 2010). Applying these prior studies to the satisfaction of life of the Korean elderly, the elderly with low subjective class consciousness, which indicates their relative position through comparison with others, have objective factors such as income level, education level and housing retention. Regardless, we can assume that this elderly will have lower life satisfaction. Already, studies on the relationship between subjective class consciousness and life satisfaction have shown that low class consciousness has an impact on low life satisfaction (Yoon & Kim, 2008; Lee & Lee, 2017).

In particular, the elderly generation in South Korea values face-to-face relationships and feels more loss of inequality than other generations. However, there are very few studies that compare and analyze the significance and size of the subjective class consciousness perceived by the elderly generation on life satisfaction.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyze the effect of subjective class consciousness perceived by elderly people over 65 years of age on life satisfaction. For this purpose, hierarchical regression analysis will be conducted using the 17th data of the Korea Labor Panel (2014). This study is expected to contribute theoretically and offer potential policies to the improvement of elderly life satisfaction according to the cultural characteristics of Korea.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Satisfaction of the Elderly's Life from the Perspective of the Social Comparative Approach

In general, life satisfaction of the elderly is considered an indicator of successful aging (Berg, 2008). In this respect, many scholars have observed the satisfaction of the elderly's life and measured and discussed it in various aspects. In particular, research on consumption among economic characteristics has been actively conducted as a main influential variable on the satisfaction of life of the elderly (Kim et al., 2016; Jung & Moon, 2018). Kim and Yoo (2012) also conducted a longitudinal study on the relationship between elderly life satisfaction and income trajectory.

According to a study by Kim and Kwon (2013), the effects of job characteristics on the life satisfaction of the elderly were examined. It was shown that the direct and indirect effects of work income, working days, physical work days and content job demands on job satisfaction were mediated by job satisfaction. In addition, Lee (2016) examined the relationship between employment, welfare, and quality of life in old age, suggesting that in order for the labor of the elderly to be directly related to the quality of life, it must be combined with the conditions of high level of welfare of the elderly and the guarantee of a stable income. Moreover, many previous studies have found that the objective living conditions of the elderly are closely related to life satisfaction through empirical analysis.

However, scholars embracing the theory of social comparison present a different view. The impact of the conditions of objective living on subjective quality of life is not deterministic and is limited. Happiness depends on relative standards, more precisely on the gap between the individual's actual situation and by only a few of the criteria he is applying. This theory is called comparison theory, discrepancy theory, or judgment theory (Schyns, 2000). Social comparison theory was first proposed by the American social psychologist Leon Festinger (1954). In analyzing the motivations and purposes of comparisons, he found that people use comparisons as a means of relative evaluation.

He also found that comparisons generally target people of a similar standard of living, and that the process of comparison shows a change in coordinating similar people, lifestyles, and ways of thinking. Subsequent studies pointed out that in addition to similar comparisons suggested by the Festinger, there are comparisons due to various motivations such as upward comparison and downward comparison (Jang, 2009; Kim, 2013). Upward comparison, for example, has the characteristic of aspirations for achievement and motivation to set goals in order to keep up with living standards, while downward comparison allows people to

evaluate their condition based on people who are considered to be less than themselves in terms of self-esteem and other factors (Taylor, Wayment & Carrillo, 1996; Nguyen et al., 2019). Similarly, Luttmer (2005) and Ferrer-i-Carbonell (2005) studied on the short-term and long-term comparisons. Short-term comparisons are those with close associates, while long-term comparisons are either those that are richer (upward comparisons) or poorer (downward comparisons). In this way, the setting of reference groups has a very important meaning as a scale for evaluating one's situation (Hyman, 1960). The reference group established has a significant impact on the subjective social status (SSS) that an individual perceives.

Stouffer et al. (1949), who studied the subjective well-being of World War II veterans, pointed out that African-American soldiers in the southern United States are happier than African-American soldiers in the north. This was explained by the fact that African-American soldiers felt less discomfort because the South had developed less than the North. In regards to this, this current study focuses on social comparative theory and also on the effect of subjective class consciousness on life satisfaction because happiness tends to change relatively. Easterlin (1974) found that the relative rise in objective gross income (GDP) and the increase in absolute income have limits in promoting happiness.

Although there is no clear orthodoxy about the relationship between income and happiness, scholars support the law of diminishing happiness that reduces the amount of happiness promoted as income increases (Layard, 2005; Inglehart et al., 2008). Happiness is relative because people have a desire to gain an edge in the status race, which subjectively compares their position with others. It is more important to interpret the conditions and how to position them in society than the objective and absolute conditions themselves (Lee & Lee, 2017; Lee & Kim, 2019; Jalal et al., 2019). In particular, the Korean society experienced a phenomenon in which subjective class consciousness changed negatively and happiness greatly decreased under the widening inequality through the 1997 financial crisis on a cultural foundation with a strong belief in egalitarianism. (Lee & Lee, 2017). Therefore, it can be inferred that the subjective class consciousness of the elderly reflecting the result of social comparison will have a significant effect on life satisfaction.

2.2. Subjective Class Recognition of the Elderly

Inequality is also actively discussed in Korean society, where the polarization of hierarchical structure and the fixation of hierarchical order are taking place. The academic community focused mainly on analyzing the causes and consequences of social inequality at the structural and institutional level (Lee, 2008; Son, 2009; Lee, 2013; Nam,

2015; Seo, 2016; Lee, 2016). In contrast, subjective class consciousness reflects the conscious dimension of social inequality. How an individual view his situation does not necessarily correspond to objective indicators. Therefore, in order to understand social inequality as a whole, it is necessary to consider both the individual's feelings and their emotions. This is because the individual's subjective sense of hierarchy and expectation of status increase are examples of personal responses to the current hierarchy.

Subjective class consciousness comprehensively shows life-time achievements and captures unobserved aspects as well as observed aspects of socioeconomic resources (Demakakos et al., 2008). Not captured in traditional socioeconomic status, but in subjective class consciousness are the neighbors, educational experience, meaningful social relationships, employment security, insecurity and career. Subjective class consciousness can also capture the relative position in the community with which the individual is associated, which is considered to have a more decisive and closer effect on the well-being of life than any other variable of objective socioeconomic status. (Marmot, 2004; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2006).

In general, the subjective class consciousness of the elderly is reported to be lower than in other generations. In particular, the subjective social status of retired seniors was very low compared to those in managerial and professional occupations. This is largely influenced by the age that active social life is no longer possible at lower income levels. In other words, the loss of status of the elderly in the labor market is an important cause of older people's low recognition of their status in society. However, subjective class consciousness can be very different in older generations, and older people with lower subjective social status have poorer mental and physical health than those who do not (Demakakos et al., 2008). Previous studies show that subjectively measured social status can be a strong predictor of health, especially for the elderly.

Low subjective social status was associated with difficulties in IADL and lower physical activity in a study of older adults in Taiwan (Hu et al., 2005). Additionally, in a study of older Americans, negative subjective class consciousness had more impact on stress-induced cortisol production than objectively measured socioeconomic status (Wright & Steptoe, 2005). According to Wang and Vanderweele (2011), who conducted a time-series study of the relationship between subjective social status and health, elderly people with low subjective social status had a significantly increased risk of long-term functional decline. The relationship between subjective belief that things are worse than others and poor health outcome was significant even after accounting for controlling demographic characteristics, objective socioeconomic status and medical environment and health status. After all, low subjective

social status is not only a measure of socioeconomic pain, but also an important measure of health risk as well.

In this respect, it is very important to examine the subjective class perceptions of Korean elderly and their effects. Despite the very high-income poverty rates of the elderly in Korea, there have been questions about whether their economic status is very poor compared to the working age generation (Lee, 2015). Since poverty is usually based on a single income baseline that applies to all citizens, material resources other than income are likely to be overlooked (Kim & Seo, 2013). As of 2015, the average net assets of households over the age of 60 were 312.57 million, more than those in their 30s (188.6 million) and those in their 40s (267.72 million), while the proportion of financial liabilities held in their 30s (68.2) and those in their 40s (70.1%) (National Statistical Office, 2015). Thus, it can be observed that economic well-being experienced by the elderly may be different from the poverty rates that are shown.

The poverty rate, measured on a single income baseline, does not reflect the difference in utility across ages. Even if the monthly income is the same, it is hard to say that the benefits of households with young children and households with the elderly are being achieved equally. This is because the amount of income required for the realization of skills varies depending on the social environment and various characteristics of the individual (Kim & Seo, 2013). Therefore, it is important for the Korean elderly to understand their socioeconomic status and how their subjective perception affects happiness.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Data

The study used 17th data (2014) of the Korean Labor and Income Panel Study. The Korea Labor Panel is a panel data that conducts an annual survey of 5,000 households and 13,000 household members living in the country, except Jeju Island. The Korean Labor Panel includes information on subjective class consciousness, income level, education level, state of economic activity, housing type, health status and marital status. A total of 1,974 samples were taken into the analysis after removing missing values and extracting the elderly aged 65 and over.

3.2. Main Variables

The dependent variable in this study was life satisfaction. The Korean Labor Panel's life satisfaction was asked on a five-point scale: family income satisfaction, leisure life satisfaction, residential environment satisfaction, family relationship satisfaction, relative relationship satisfaction, social intimacy satisfaction, and overall satisfaction. In

this study, recoding was carried out so that the higher the value, the higher the satisfaction (very dissatisfied = 0, very satisfied = 4), and then the numbers were summed against the total rating scale (minimum value = 0, maximum value = 28). Prior to the reliability analysis, the Cronbach's alpha value was as high as .894.

The independent variable of this study was subjective hierarchy. The Korean Labor Panel measures subjective class consciousness on a six-point scale with the question: Where do you think your socio-economic status (considering income, occupation, education, property, etc.) belongs? (Top level = 1, upper level = 2, upper middle layer = 3, lower middle layer = 4, lower layer = 5, lowest layer = 6).

In this study, subjective class consciousness was classified into the upper middle, lower middle, lower and lowest layers and used for analysis. Unlike previous studies that classify the upper, middle, and lower classes, the reasons for classifying the upper, middle, lower, and lowest levels were only 17 (0.9%) who perceived themselves as upper or uppermost among the elderly samples used in the analysis.

Finally, the control variables of this study are income level, education level, economic activity status, housing type, gender, age, marital status, health status and religion, which many studies indicated to be related to life satisfaction. As defined by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), less than 50% of household disposable median income is divided among the poor, 50% – 150% of the middle class, and more than 150% of the middle class. The level of education distinguished between high school and below and college and above, and economic activity classified paid labor participation and non-paid labor, and housing type divided self, rent, rent, and others. Ages were classified as 65-74 years old and 75 years old or older, and marital status classified married, spouse, separated, divorced, bereavement and others.

The state of health used a 5-point scale in the analysis (very good = 0, very bad = 4), and religion was classified as either religious or nonreligious. The analysis framework of this study is summarized in Table 1.

3.3. Analysis Method

This study conducted hierarchical multiple regression test to analyze the significance and magnitude of the effect of subjective class consciousness on life satisfaction. Hierarchical regression is an analysis method that allows variables to be sequentially entered into the analysis to compare relative magnitudes of influence. This paper first analyzes the gender, age, marital status, health status and religion of the elderly according to demographic characteristics. Finally, subjective hierarchy was put into analysis. Prior to this, all the independent and control variables were introduced into the multiple regression model, and no problems of multicollinearity were found.

Table 1: Operational Definition of Variables and Methods of Measurement

Division	Variable name	Definition and measurement of variables
Dependent variable	Life satisfaction	Continuous variable (minimum value = 0, maximum value = 28)
Independent variable	Subjective hierarchy	Upper middle layer or higher = 0, middle lower layer = 1, lower layer = 2, lowest layer = 3
Control variable	Income level	Impoverished Class = 0, Middle Class = 1, Middle Class Above = 2
	Education level	High school and below = 0, College and above = 1
	Economic activity	Paid work participation = 0, No paid work participation = 1
	Housing type	Self = 0, Charter/rent and others = 1
	Gender	Male = 0, Female = 1
	Age	65 years old or older ~ 74 years old = 0, 75 years old or older = 1
	Marital status	Married = 0, Divorce, bereavement, separation = 1
	Health status	Continuous variable (minimum value = 0, maximum value = 4)
	Religion	No religion = 0, religion = 1

4. Research Results

4.1. General Characteristics of the Sample

The general characteristics of the elderly sample used in this paper are summarized in Table 2. First, the average life satisfaction was 15.704 (standard deviation = 3.5785). The subjective consciousness was 206 (10.4%) in the upper and upper middle, 760 (38.5%) in the lower and middle, 647 (32.8%) in the lower and 361 (18.3%) in the lowest.

The income level was 906 (45.9%) for the poor, 887 (44.9%) for the middle class, and 181 (9.2%) for the middle class and above. The level of education was 1,777 students (90.0%) below high school, 197 students (10.0%) above college, and economic activity status was 676 (34.2%) who participated in paid labor, and 1,298 (65.8%) who did not participate in paid work. The housing type were 1,456 inhabitants (73.7%), charter and other 518 people (26.3%).

The gender was 1,155 males (58.5%), and 819 females (41.5%). The marital status was 1,033 (52.3%) married and 941 (47.7%) divorced or separated. The religious status was 901 (45.6%) without religion and 1,073 (54.4%) with religion.

The above descriptive statistics show that the elderly people's life satisfaction is not as high as the median (14 points), while the proportion of those who consider themselves as lower or lowest is higher than half. The percentage of the elderly who consider themselves lower or lowest was higher than that of the poor at the objective level of income. Additionally, many of the elderly who regarded themselves as middle class (middle or middle class) perceived themselves as middle class.

4.2. Results of Mean Comparison

Table 3 shows the results of the analysis of the average difference in life satisfaction according to subjective class consciousness, socioeconomic and demographic factors of the sample. As a result, the difference of life satisfaction according to subjective class consciousness proved to be significant ($p < .05$). The difference in life satisfaction according to subjective class consciousness was hierarchical in order of upper middle class, middle class, lower class lower level.

On the other hand, life satisfaction according to income class also appeared hierarchically in the order of middle class and above, middle class and then the poor level. The level of education was higher than that of seniors with higher education or higher than the seniors with lower education. The satisfaction of life was higher than the elderly.

In terms of gender, older men were older than the females, and the older ages were from around 65-74. It was also observed that the older wives were older than 75, and married wives were older than the married spouses. Elderly people with religion had higher life satisfaction than older people without religion.

4.3. Results of Hierarchical Regression

The results of analyzing the magnitude of the subjective class consciousness, demographic characteristics and socioeconomic characteristics of the elderly on life satisfaction through hierarchical regression analysis are shown in Table 4. As explained in the research method, the first stage was used to analyze gender, age, marital status, health status and religion, which are demographic

Table 2: General characteristics of the sample

Division	Variable name	Definition and measurement of variables
Dependent variable	Life satisfaction	Mean = 15.704, standard deviation = 3.575, minimum = 0, maximum = 28
Independent variable	Subjective hierarchy	More than upper middle = 206 (10.4%), middle and lower = 760 (38.5%), lower = 647 (32.8%), lowest = 361 (18.3%)
Control variable	Income level	Poor = 906 (45.9%), middle class = 887 (44.9%), Middle class and above = 181 people (9.2%)
	Education level	High school and below = 1,777 students (90.0%), college and above = 197 students (10.0%)
	Economic activity	Paid labor participation = 676 (34.2%), paid labor absent = 1,298 (65.8%)
	Housing type	Self = 1,456(73.7%), charter/rent and others = 518(26.3%)
	Gender	Male = 1,155 (58.5%), Female = 819 (41.5%)
	Age	65 years old or older -74 years old or less = 1,063 (53.9%), 75 years old or older = 911 people (46.1%)
	Marital status	Married = 1,033 (52.3%), divorce, bereavement, separation = 941 (47.7%)
	Health status	Mean = 2.240, standard deviation = .896
	Religion	No religion = 901 (45.6%), Religion = 1,073 (54.4%)

Table 3: Differences in Life Satisfaction according to Subjective Class Awareness and Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Elderly

Variable		Frequency	Medium	Standard Deviation	F/t	Post test
Subjective hierarchy	Upper middle and above	206	18.738	3.073	247.329***	Upper middle and above> Middle Lower> Lower Levels> Lowest layer
	Middle lower	760	16.826	2.808		
	Lower levels	647	15.257	2.929		
	Lowest layer	361	12.410	3.673		
Income level	Poverty	906	14.436	3.728	127.667***	Middle class and above Middle Class> Poverty
	Middle class	887	16.583	3.042		
	Middle class and above	181	17.740	2.933		
Education level	High school or below	1777	15.487	3.554	-8.230***	College or above> High school or below
	College or above	197	17.660	3.156		
Economic activity	Paid labor participation	676	16.274	3.074	5.486***	Paid Labor Participation> No Paid Labor
	No paid labor	1298	15.407	3.778		
Housing type	Self	1455	16.299	3.325	12.819***	charter/rent and others
	charter/rent and others	517	14.045	3.729		
Gender	Male	1155	16.262	3.458	8.389***	Male> female
	Female	819	14.916	3.592		
Age	65-74 years old	1063	16.038	3.361	4.465***	65-74 years old> 75 years old or older
	75 years old or older	911	15.314	3.774		
Marital status	Married	1033	16.535	3.243	11.163***	Married> Divorce, bereavement, separation
	Divorce, bereavement, separation	941	14.791	3.700		
Religion	No religion	901	15.457	3.469	-2.823**	Has religion> No religion
	Has Religion	1073	15.911	3.651		
Sum						

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

characteristics. Activity status and dwelling type were used for the second stage of the analysis. Finally, in the third stage, subjective hierarchy was put into the analysis as well. The significance of the regression model at each stage was $p = .000$ and no problem was found.

First, the demographic variables introduced in Stage 1 accounted for 16.7% of the elderly's life satisfaction. Marital status ($\beta = -.215$), health status ($\beta = -.332$), and religion status ($\beta = .081$) had a significant effect on the life satisfaction of the elderly. Specifically, the divorce, separation, and bereavement were found to be significantly lower in the elderly people's life satisfaction as they were divorced, separated, and bereaved.

Next, the variables of socioeconomic characteristics introduced in the second stage significantly increased the explanatory power of 9.2% in addition to the life satisfaction of the elderly. Gender ($\beta = .087$), age ($\beta = .063$), marital status ($\beta = -.163$), health status ($\beta = -.276$) and religion status ($\beta = .072$). At the same time, income level, education level ($\beta = .082$), economic activity status ($\beta = .049$) and housing type ($\beta = -.180$) had a significant effect on the life satisfaction of the elderly. In terms of income level, the life satisfaction of the middle class ($\beta = .208$) and the middle-class group ($\beta = .170$) was significantly higher than that of the poor. In general, elderly people with high socioeconomic status such as high-income level and education level, participation in paid labor, and self-owning have high life satisfaction.

Lastly, the subjective class consciousness variable introduced in step 3 increased 8.4% of the explanatory power of elderly people's life satisfaction. In the second stage, the additional explanatory power was 4.1% when only the income level was separately analyzed. Through this, it can be confirmed that the explanatory power of the life satisfaction of the elderly in subjective class consciousness is relatively large compared to the objective income level.

Finally, the research model of this paper explained 34.3% of life satisfaction of the elderly. In the three-stage model, all variables except education level and economic activity had a significant effect. In the subjective class consciousness, the life satisfaction of the lower middle ($\beta = -.172$), lower layer ($\beta = -.298$) and the lowest layer ($\beta = -.469$) was significantly lower than that of the upper middle layer. The magnitude of the influence was generally higher than other demographic and socioeconomic variables.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzed the effects of subjective class consciousness on life satisfaction in the situations where the high suicide rate and low quality of life of Korean elderly were emerging as social problems. Subjective class consciousness affects life satisfaction while controlling the influence of demographic factors such as gender, age, marital status,

health status, religion, and socioeconomic factors such as income level, education level, economic activity status and housing type. We aimed to analyze the significance of the impact and the amount of explanatory power in this setting. For this purpose, the Korean Labor Panel 17th (2014) data were used to sample the elderly aged 65 and older and one-way ANOVA and hierarchical regression analysis were performed. The results of the main analysis are summarized as follows.

First, as a result of analyzing the life satisfaction of the elderly, the average value (15.704) was similar to the median value (14.000) and could not be seen as high. In addition, as a result of analyzing the subjective class consciousness of the elderly, many considered themselves as the lower or the lowest of the classes. Most elderly people who did not perceive themselves as either lower or lowest class were also recognized as middle and lower class. This shows that the satisfaction of life experienced by the elderly in Korea is not high and that the subjective class consciousness is also negative. This shows that the economic well-being of the Korean elderly is not good even considering the limitations of the income poverty measure pointed out by Kim and Seo (2013). The low life satisfaction and negative subjective class consciousness of the Korean elderly seems to be related to the low life satisfaction and high suicide rate indicated by Kim (2016) and OECD (2017).

Second, according to the subjective class consciousness, there was a significant difference in the life satisfaction of the elderly. Older people who regarded themselves as the lowest had the lowest satisfaction with life. The satisfaction of life of the elderly who considered themselves above the middle class was the highest. Given the inconsistency between objective income levels and subjective class consciousness, it can be assumed that a subjective assessment of one's socioeconomic status can have a more significant impact on life satisfaction. This supports the results of previous studies (Adler et al., 2008; Franzini & Fernandez-Escquer, 2006; Ghaed & Gallo, 2007; Hu et al., 2005), which show that there are differences in mental and physical health depending on subjective class consciousness. It can be seen as.

Third, subjective class consciousness explained 8.4% of life satisfaction of the elderly. This was similar to the extent that socioeconomic variables such as income level, education level, economic activity status and housing type explained the satisfaction of the elderly's life (9.2%). The level of explanation was much greater than the level of income (4.1%) that independently explained the satisfaction of the elderly's life. In addition, the magnitude of the relative influence on the life satisfaction of the subjective class consciousness confirmed through the beta value was larger than other variables. It supports Stouffer et al. (1949) and Easterlin (1974) previous studies in that subjective

Table 4: Hierarchical Regression Results

Division	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B(S.E)	β	t	B(S.E)	β	t	B(S.E)	β	t
(Constant)	18.148 (.677)		26.805***	15.355 (.709)		21.667***	17.215 (.711)		24.208***
Gender (By: men)	.396 (.255)	.055	1.556	.628 (.243)	.087	2.587*	.660 (.229)	.091	2.884**
Age group (By: 65-74 years old)	.174 (.155)	.024	1.122	.451 (.155)	.063	2.916**	.407 (.146)	.057	2.793**
Marital status (By: married)	-1.536 (.249)	-.215	-6.180***	-1.168 (.237)	-.163	-4.922***	-.917 (.224)	-.128	-4.086***
Health	-1.325 (.088)	-.332	-15.106***	-1.101 (.087)	-.276	-12.607***	-.808 (.084)	-.202	-9.573***
Religion (Reference: no religion)	.583 (.151)	.081	3.847***	.515 (.144)	.072	3.587***	.519 (.135)	.072	3.836***
Income level (By: poverty level)									
Middle class				1.496 (.159)	.208	9.425***	.761 (.157)	.106	4.847***
Middle class and above				2.102 (.272)	.170	7.727***	.975 (.269)	.079	3.626***
Education level (standard: high school and below)				.975 (.246)	.082	3.959***	.433 (.237)	.036	1.826
Economic activity (By: paid work participation)				.366 (.164)	.049	2.225*	.169 (.156)	.022	1.089
Housing type (By self)				-1.463 (.164)	-.180	-8.910***	-.770 (.161)	-.095	-4.781***
Subjective hierarchy (by: upper middle class)									
Mid-tier							-1.262 (.240)	-.172	-5.257***
Low layer							-2.272 (.260)	-.298	-8.737***
Lowest layer							-4.339 (.305)	-.469	-14.220***
F	78.721***			68.646***			78.619***		
R ² change	.167			.092			.084		
R ²	.167			.259			.343		
Durbin-Watson							1.770		

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

class consciousness, which represents the relative socio-economic status of comparing others with themselves, has a very important effect on elderly people's life satisfaction. As previous studies have shown, low subjective class consciousness negatively affects mental and physical health

and hormonal secretion (Hu et al., 2005; Wright & Steptoe, 2005; Chen et al., 2011).

The results of the analysis suggest that raising the subjective class consciousness of the elderly, as Marmot (2004) and Wilkinson and Pickett (2006) pointed out, may

be important in improving life satisfaction. Subjective class consciousness has a significant correlation with life satisfaction because the satisfaction of recognition needs has a significant effect on mental health. Moreover, as Ko and Hwang (2013) argued, due to the cultural characteristics of Korean society that place importance on status or face, perceptions of relative and subjective classes through comparison with others have more influence on life satisfaction than large and small incomes.

Therefore, it can be evaluated that policy efforts are needed to improve the subjective social status that Korean elderly are aware of. Specifically, efforts are needed to alleviate inequalities in generations that negatively impact social comparison processes. Indeed, in Korea, the elderly aged 65 or older have a much higher income inequality than the working age of 18-64. As of 2016, the market income Gini coefficient of the elderly generation was .540, which is very high compared to the .309 Gini coefficient of working age generation. This severe income inequality in households is thought to contribute to lowering life satisfaction by making the older people more negative than they actually are.

Thus, in the process of expanding old-age pensions, it is necessary to make efforts to reduce inequality in the elderly generation and to raise the standard of living equally by giving more consideration to the elderly. It is necessary to improve the subjective class consciousness of the elderly by equally guaranteeing a certain level of living by strengthening basic pensions and providing general care services.

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