

# Observing Changes in the Status of Korean Women through Statistics

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This paper briefly presents the changes in the life and status of Korean women by analyzing relevant indicators.

## 1. Population, Family, and Health

### *106.1 births of male vs. 100 births of female*

The indicator of sex ratio at birth is significant in Korea which represents the status of women since there has been a preference for sons in childbirth throughout Korean culture. According to the change of sex ratio at birth for the past thirty years, the figure was the lowest 105.3 in 1980 and the highest 116.5 in 1990. The reason why there was a disparity of sex ratio at birth in 1980 and 1990 is revealed when this paper focuses on sex ratio at birth by birth order. There was no explicit difference of sex ratio at birth by birth order in 1980 that showed the lowest sex ratio at birth: the sex ratio at birth among the first children, second children, third children, and fourth children were 106.0, 106.5, 106.9, and 110.2 respectively. However, there was a distinctive difference of sex ratio at birth by birth order in 1990 that presented the highest sex ratio at birth: the sex ratio at birth among the first, second, third, and fourth children were 108.5,

117.0, 188.8, 209.2 respectively. This result seems to be influenced by the increase of induced abortion through medical surgery rather than simply by a higher preference of son in childbirth compared to other times. There had been a gradual decline of sex ratio at birth since 1990 and the figure in 2007 was 106.1. In case of the sex ratio at birth among the third and fourth children in 2007, the figures were 115.4 and 119.4 respectively.

<Table 1>

### Sex Ratio at Birth by Birth Order

Unit: %

| Year | Total | First Children | Second Children | Third Children | Fourth Children and upward |
|------|-------|----------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| 1975 | 112.4 | 120.0          | 109.8           | 110.8          | 105.5                      |
| 1980 | 105.3 | 106.0          | 106.5           | 106.9          | 110.2                      |
| 1985 | 109.4 | 106.0          | 107.8           | 129.2          | 146.8                      |
| 1990 | 116.5 | 108.5          | 117.0           | 188.8          | 209.2                      |
| 1995 | 113.2 | 105.8          | 111.7           | 177.2          | 203.9                      |
| 2000 | 110.2 | 106.2          | 107.4           | 141.7          | 167.5                      |
| 2005 | 107.7 | 104.8          | 106.4           | 127.7          | 133.5                      |
| 2007 | 106.1 | 104.4          | 105.9           | 115.2          | 119.4                      |

Source: Korean Women's Development Institute (2008), Women in Korea.

The total fertility rate in 2007 was approximately 1.26 which increased by 0.13

over the previous year. The total fertility rate in Korea had decreased from 3.74 in 1975, and there has been a slight increase since 2006 onwards. The fertility rate of the age group between 30~34 was 102.2 with increase of 12 over the previous year, and the figure of the age group between 25~29 was 96.1 with increase of 6.2 over 89.9 of the previous year.

The number of women household heads who have responsibility to support the members of the household has increased by around 3.2 times from 1,169 in 1980 to 3,689 in 2008. The increase rate of women heads of household was far higher than that of men albeit the number of men householders is larger than that of women in terms of scale since the number of men householders has increased by about 1.9 times from 6,801 in

**<Table 2>**  
**Age-specific Fertility Rate and Total Fertility Rate**

Unit : Births per 1,000 women, per women

| Year | Age-specific Fertility Rate <sup>2)</sup> (per 1,000 women) |       |       |       |       |       |       | Total Fertility Rate |
|------|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------------------|
|      | 15~19   | 20~24 | 25~29 | 30~34 | 35~39 | 40~44 | 45~49 |                      |
| 1975 | 14.2  | 177.6 | 262.8 | 145.6 | 57.9  | 20.7  | 5.0   | 3.47                 |
| 1980 | 12.9  | 141.4 | 244.1 | 106.6 | 30.6  | 8.5   | 2.0   | 2.83                 |
| 1990 | 4.2   | 83.2  | 169.4 | 50.5  | 9.6   | 1.5   | 0.2   | 1.59                 |
| 1995 | 3.6   | 62.9  | 177.1 | 69.6  | 15.2  | 2.3   | 0.2   | 1.65                 |
| 2000 | 2.5   | 39.0  | 150.6 | 84.2  | 17.4  | 2.6   | 0.2   | 1.47                 |
| 2005 | 2.1   | 17.9  | 92.3  | 82.4  | 19.0  | 2.5   | 0.2   | 1.08                 |
| 2006 | 2.2   | 17.7  | 89.9  | 90.2  | 21.5  | 2.6   | 0.2   | 1.13                 |
| 2007 | -   | 19.6  | 96.1  | 102.2 | 25.8  | -     | -     | 1.26                 |

Note: 1) The average number of babies born to women during their reproductive years (age 15-49), commonly used for comparison of fertility rates.

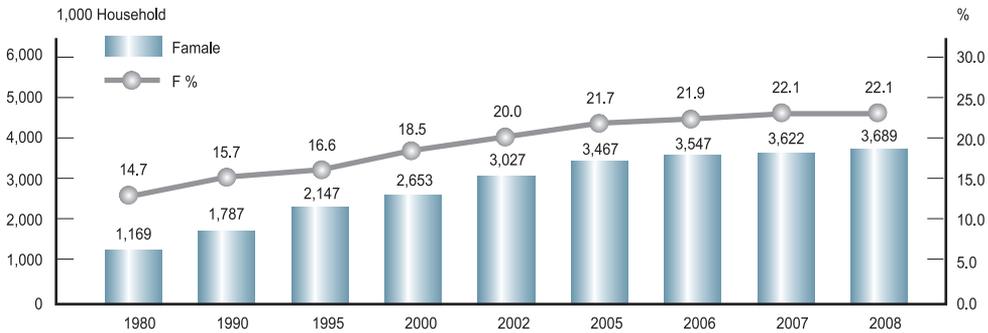
2) The number of births in each age group by the total female population (in thousands) in each age group

Source: Korea National Statistical Office, Annual Report on the Vital Statistics.

**22.1% of the head of households in 2008 are women**

1980 to 12,985 in 2008. The proportion of women heads of households has risen moderately from 14.7% in 1980 to 22.1% in 2008.

Figure 1. Female heads of household

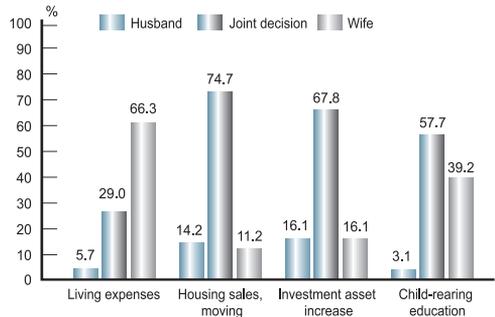


Source: Korea National Statistical Office, Population and Housing Census Report. Materials in Population Projection are utilized for the figures after 2002.

**Decision making by man and wife within a household**

According to a research in 2006, most decision-makings within a household were made jointly by the husband and the wife. Although 65.3% of living expenses were determined by wives in 2006, many other agendas in household were determined jointly by the man and the wife, such as selling and buying a house and disposal, investment and multiplication of a property, and childcare and education. In case of decision making about childcare and education which is considered vital in recent days, the proportion of wives' decision is 39.2% which is significantly higher than husbands' decision (3.1%).

Figure 2. Decision-making by Married Couples: 2006



Note: Survey with married households of ages from 15 to 59 years old  
 Source: Korea Institute for Health & Social Affairs, National Fertility and Family Health Survey Report 2006.

**Married women's contribution to house chores (3 hours and 18 minutes) in 2004 was 7.6 times higher than married men's contribution (26 minutes)**

Married women’s use of time for house chores in 2004 was 3 hours and 18 minutes which was 2 hours and 52 minutes more than married men (26 minutes) according to the Life Time Use Survey conducted by the Korea National Statistical Office. Though married women’s use of time for house chores explicitly declined when compared to the first survey in 1999, married women devoted their time 7.6 times more than married men did. In case of unmarried men and women, the use of time for house chores slightly increased over 1999 when it was 45 minutes and 18 minutes for women and men respectively.

<Table 3>  
**Time Spent on Household Affairs by Marital Status**

Unit: Hours

| Year | Single |        |      | Married |        |      |
|------|--------|--------|------|---------|--------|------|
|      | Total  | Female | Male | Total   | Female | Male |
| 1999 | 0:25   | 0:37   | 0:15 | 2:39    | 4:30   | 0:36 |
| 2004 | 0:30   | 0:45   | 0:18 | 1:58    | 3:18   | 0:26 |

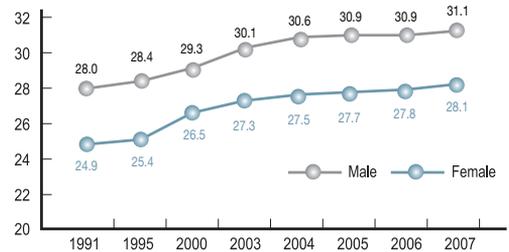
Note: Population of age 20 and over.  
 Source: Korea National Statistical Office (2000, 2005), Life Time Use Survey.

**International marriages account for 11.1% of all the marriages (345,592) in 2007**

The average age at first marriage in 2007 was 28.1 years old for women and 31.1 years old for men (women’s mean age at the first marriage is 3 years earlier than men’s age at the first marriage) and this presents 2.7 years increase for both men and women compared with 1995. The number of marriages had

declined from 398,484 cases in 1995 to 316,375 cases in 2005. However, overall 345,592 couples were married in 2007, showing increase from 2005. Recently, the interest in multicultural family is increasing as international marriages increase. The proportion of international marriage was very low (3.4%) in 1995, but the highest percentage of international marriage was 13.6% (43,121 cases) in 2005 that presented the lowest number of marriages, and 11.1% of all the marriages were international marriages in 2007.

Figure 3. Mean Age at First Marriage



<Table 4>  
**International Marriage**

Unit: Hours

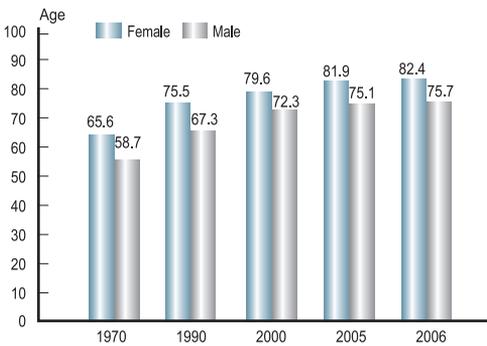
| Year | Total Marriages | International Marriages |                                  |                                     |
|------|-----------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|      |                 | Sub total               | Wives with different nationality | Husbands with different nationality |
| 1995 | 398,484         | 13,494 (3.4)            | 10,365                           | 3,129                               |
| 2000 | 334,030         | 12,319 (3.7)            | 7,304                            | 5,015                               |
| 2005 | 316,375         | 43,121 (13.6)           | 31,180                           | 11,941                              |
| 2007 | 345,592         | 38,491 (11.1)           | 29,140                           | 9,351                               |

Note: ( ) refers to the percentage of international marriages out of the total number of marriages  
 Source: Korea National Statistical Office, Annual Report on the Vital Statistics.

**6.9 years increase in women’s life expectancy in 2006 compared to 1990**

Women’s life expectancy in 2006 was 82.4 years old, which was 6.7 year longer than men’s life expectancy (75.7 years old). This means that 6.9 years and 8.4 years increase for women and men respectively, compared to 1990. The gap of life expectancy between men and women increased between 1970 and 1990: 6.9 years in 1970 and 8.2 years in 1990. Nevertheless, the decreasing tendency of life expectancy gap between men and women was observed: 7.3 years in 2000 and 6.7 years in 2006.

Figure 4. Average life expectancy



Source: Korea National Statistical Office, Life Table 2006.

**2. Education**

**25.4 among 100 women in 2005 graduated from college and higher**

25.4% of Korean women of 25 old years of age or older was educated in colleges or higher education. In case of women’s educational attainment, there were 77.1% of women who graduated from elementary school in 1975, but

the percentage of women who were educated lower than elementary school was 25.5% in 2005. Furthermore, the proportion of women who graduated from high schools and colleges and higher were 37.0% and 25.4% respectively in 2005. Nevertheless, men whose educational opportunities were higher than women showed decrease among those educated at elementary school and lower, and increase among those educated at colleges and higher.

<Table 5>

**Distribution of Women Population 25 Years Old & Over by Educational Attainment**

Unit: %

| Year, Sex |        | Elementary School and lower | Middle School | High School | College and higher |
|-----------|--------|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 1975      | Female | 77.1                        | 12.1          | 8.4         | 2.4                |
|           | Male   | 53.1                        | 17.7          | 9.7         | 9.5                |
| 1985      | Female | 54.1                        | 20.5          | 20.2        | 5.2                |
|           | Male   | 31.9                        | 20.5          | 32.1        | 15.5               |
| 1995      | Female | 35.0                        | 17.1          | 34.8        | 13.1               |
|           | Male   | 17.8                        | 14.2          | 41.4        | 26.6               |
| 2005      | Female | 25.5                        | 12.1          | 37.0        | 25.4               |
|           | Male   | 12.2                        | 10.2          | 39.7        | 37.8               |

Note: Age 25 and over.

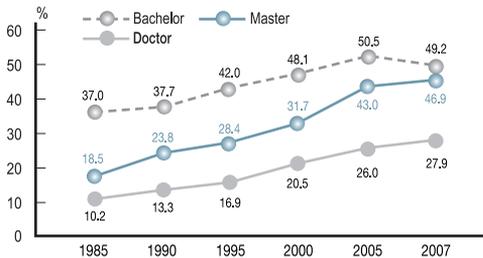
Source: Korea National Statistical Office, Population and Housing Census Report

**Women constitute 27.9% of doctoral graduates in 2007**

Korean women have presented great development in terms of equal right for education. The proportion of women among those with bachelor’s degree was only 37.0% in 1985 but the proportion increased by 12.2% to reach 49.2% in 2007. Moreover, the proportion of women among those who hold master’s degree and doctoral degree during corresponding period increased 28.4% and 17.7% respectively. This reflects a great

change of increasing higher education for women. There seems to be no or very slight disparity between men and women in the number of people who holds bachelors' and master's degree due to the increase of women's participation in higher education. Nevertheless, the percentage of women among doctoral graduates was 27.9% in 2007 which was explicitly lower than the proportion of men doctoral graduates.

Figure 5. Degree Holders



Note: Figures for bachelor's degree holders include colleges, universities, teacher training colleges and open universities. Figures for 1985 and 1990 include college and teacher training college only.  
 Source: Korea National Statistical Office, Population and Housing Census Report, Population Projection, & Korea Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development, Statistical Yearbook of Education.

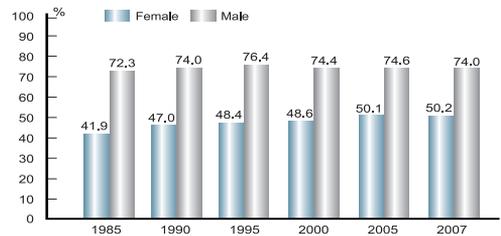
### 3. Economic Activity

#### *Women's labor market participation 50.2% in 2007 increasing by 8.3% over 1985*

The economic activity participation rate has increased gradually although not at great speed. Women's labor market participation rate reached 50% range in 2005 for the first time from 41.9% in 1985, and the figure in 2007 was 50.2% which was 8.3% higher than that of 1985. On the other hand, men's labor market participation hit its peak of 76.4% in 1995, and men's labor market participation in 2007 was 74.0% because of gradual decline from the

peak. Although the disparity of labor market participation between men and women decreased from 30.4% in 1985 to 23.8% in 2007, the gap of labor market participation rate between men and women is still wide.

Figure 6. Economic Activities by Sex



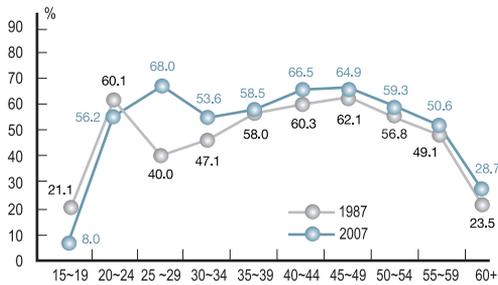
Source: Korea National Statistical Office, Annual Report on the Economically Active Population.

#### *M-shape of Korean women's labor market participation graph due to child delivery and child rearing*

The change in Korean women's labor market participation rate is presented as M-shape line graph. In case of data in 2007, women's labor market participation between ages 15 to 19 was 8.0%, but it increased gradually and reached its peak of 68.0% between ages 25 to 29. After marriage, women's labor market participation was 53.6% between ages 30 to 34 that decreased by 14.4% due to child delivery and child rearing. Re-entering the labor market, women between 55 and 59 years old indicated higher labor market participation rate than the average participation rate. This pattern is similar with the fluctuation of women's labor market participation rate in 1985. Two differences between the present and 1985 are: the change in age for first diminution in labor market participation due to child delivery and child rearing between 25 and 29, and increase in women's labor market participation in the

age group older than 29 years of age.

Figure 7. Participation Rate of Economically Active Women by Age



Source: Korea National Statistical Office, Annual Report on the Economically Active Population Survey.

**Women in professional and technical occupations account for 19.3% of women workers in 2007**

The proportion of women in professional and technical occupations among employed women was 19.3%, which is 13.9% increase over 1985. The proportion of women in professional and technical occupations was less than 10% by the early 1990's but the percentage increased to 11.4% in 1995, 14.0% in 2000, 17.5% in 2005, and 19.3% in 2007 respectively. Furthermore, in light of the scale of increase in the professional and technical workers' rate of men and women, women's increase scale is larger than that of men except in 1995. The women's proportion of professional and technical workers has increased and reached 26.6% in 2007 except for women's great decrease in 1995 because of drastic increasing scale of men's proportion in professional and technical occupations.

<Table 6>

**Professional and Technical Workers by Sex**

Unit : 1,000 persons, %

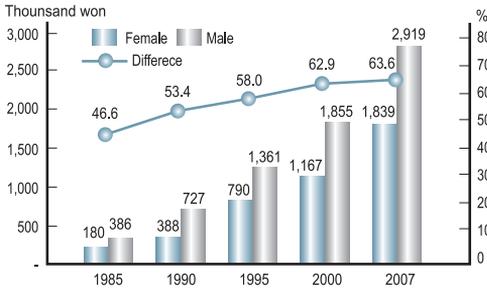
| Year | Female           |   |   | Male             |                                  |   | Women |
|------|------------------|---|---|------------------|----------------------------------|---|-------|
|      | Employed workers | proportion among professional & technical workers | Proportion of professional & technical workers among employed workers | Employed workers | Professional & Technical workers | Proportion of professional & technical workers among employed workers |       |
| 1970 | 3,513            | 85  | 2.4   | 6,104            | 377                              | 6.2   | 18.4  |
| 1975 | 4,261            | 87  | 2.0   | 7,431            | 329                              | 4.4   | 20.9  |
| 1980 | 5,222            | 186   | 3.6   | 8,462            | 546                              | 6.5   | 25.4  |
| 1985 | 5,833            | 317   | 5.4   | 9,137            | 773                              | 8.5   | 29.1  |
| 1990 | 7,376            | 566   | 7.7   | 10,709           | 1,009                            | 9.4   | 35.9  |
| 1995 | 8,267            | 939   | 11.4  | 12,147           | 2,407                            | 19.8  | 28.1  |
| 2000 | 8,769            | 1,225   | 14.0  | 12,387           | 2,716                            | 21.9  | 31.1  |
| 2005 | 9,526            | 1,669   | 17.5  | 13,330           | 3,107                            | 23.3  | 34.9  |
| 2007 | 9,826            | 1,900   | 19.3  | 13,607           | 3,296                            | 24.2  | 36.6  |

Source: Korea National Statistical Office, Annual Report on the Economically Active Population Survey.

**Average monthly wage of women salary workers in 2007 was 1,839 thousand won, which was 63.6% of men's**

Korean employed women are suffering not only from difficulty of reconciling work and child delivery and child rearing but also from lower income level than that of men. Although the average monthly wage of women salary workers in 2007 increased to 1,839 thousands won compared with 2000, it was only 63.6% of men salary workers' average monthly wage. The ratio of women's income against men's income has increased from 46.6% in 1985, to 53.4% in 1990, 58.0% in 1995, 62.9% in 2000, and 63.6% in 2007, but women's income is still distinctively lower than men's income.

Figure 8. Average Monthly Wage



Note: Average Monthly Wage=Monthly salary+(Total yearly bonus÷12).

Source: Korea Ministry of Labor, Survey Report on Wage Structure, Survey Report on Occupational Wage Survey.

#### 4. Korean Women's Political and Administrative Participation and International Comparison of the Social Status of Korean Women

*Women constituted 13.7% of representatives at the 18<sup>th</sup> National Assembly, showing increase by 0.7% compared to 2004*

Political sphere in Korea is one of the sectors with low participation of women. The percentage of women representatives in the 18th National Assembly (299 persons) is 13.7% (41 persons) in 2008. It is the highest proportion of women representatives, though there has been increase in the number of women representatives from 1 in 1978, to 6 in 1988, 16 in 2000, 39 in 2004, and 41 in 2008. In addition, the number of women representatives in local assemblies has increased from 0.9% in 1991, to 3.4% in 2002, and 14.5% in 2006, but the percentage of women's participation is still lower than that of men.

&lt;Table 7&gt;

#### Women Elected in General and Local Elections

Unit: Person, %

| Year | National Assembly |                                 |      | Local Council |                                 |      |
|------|-------------------|---------------------------------|------|---------------|---------------------------------|------|
|      | Total             | Number of women representatives | F %  | Total         | Number of women representatives | F %  |
| 1971 | 204               | 5                               | 2.5  | -             | -                               | -    |
| 1973 | 146               | 12                              | 8.2  | -             | -                               | -    |
| 1978 | 154               | 1                               | 0.6  | -             | -                               | -    |
| 1981 | 276               | 9                               | 3.3  | -             | -                               | -    |
| 1985 | 276               | 8                               | 2.9  | -             | -                               | -    |
| 1988 | 299               | 6                               | 2.0  | -             | -                               | -    |
| 1991 | -                 | -                               | -    | 5,169         | 48                              | 0.9  |
| 1992 | 299               | 3                               | 1.0  | -             | -                               | -    |
| 1995 | -                 | -                               | -    | 5,756         | 128                             | 2.2  |
| 1996 | 299               | 9                               | 3.0  | -             | -                               | -    |
| 1998 | -                 | -                               | -    | 4,179         | 97                              | 2.3  |
| 2000 | 273               | 16                              | 5.9  | -             | -                               | -    |
| 2002 | -                 | -                               | -    | 4,167         | 140                             | 3.4  |
| 2004 | 299               | 39                              | 13.0 | -             | -                               | -    |
| 2006 | -                 | -                               | -    | 3,626         | 525                             | 14.5 |
| 2008 | 299               | 41                              | 13.7 | -             | -                               | -    |

Source: Korea National Election Commission, Web DB.

*67.7% who passed the higher civil examination for foreign affairs were women in 2007*

Recently, Korean women's administrative participation is increasing at high ranks. The percentages of successful women candidates among public service personnel employment examination were 67.7% in the higher civil examination for foreign affairs, 49.0% in the higher civil examination for national administration, and 45.5% in the examination for employment lowest-level officials (9th grade, administration and public peace). The comparison between 2007 and 2006 suggests 2.7% and 2.0% decrease in women's portion in

bare examination and examination for employment lowest-level officials (administration and public peace) respectively, and 4.4%, 31.7% and 7.7% of increase in the higher civil examination for national administration, the higher civil examination for foreign affairs, and examination for employment lower-level officials (7th grade, administration and public peace) respectively. Especially, the increasing rate in the higher civil examination for foreign affairs is drastic.

school attendance rate, and difference in real GDP per se between men and women. Korea is ranked as 26th in GDI among 93 nations in 2007/2008. Nevertheless, Korea was included in the lowest group as 64th among 93 countries in 2007 in light of GEM which suggests the degree of gender equality in the use of resources. GEM in 2007/2008 declined 5 ranks compared with figures in 2005. According to the increase and decrease of related indicators, there were 0.4% and 2%

**<Table8 >  
Successful Applicant Rate in  
Examination for Administrative**

Unit: Person, %

| Year | Administration Service Category |      | Foreign Service 5th Category |      | Judicial Examination |      | Admin. & Safety Service 7th Category |      | Admin. & Safety Service 9th, Category |      |
|------|---------------------------------|------|------------------------------|------|----------------------|------|--------------------------------------|------|---------------------------------------|------|
|      | Total                           | F %  | Total                        | F %  | Total                | F %  | Total                                | F %  | Total                                 | F %  |
| 2001 | 233                             | 25.3 | 30                           | 36.7 | 991                  | 17.5 | 531                                  | 16.8 | 2,611                                 | 39.5 |
| 2002 | 257                             | 28.4 | 35                           | 45.7 | 998                  | 23.9 | 517                                  | 28.4 | 2,585                                 | 50.9 |
| 2003 | 223                             | 31.8 | 28                           | 35.7 | 906                  | 21.0 | 500                                  | 23.0 | 1,587                                 | 50.8 |
| 2004 | 198                             | 38.4 | 20                           | 35.0 | 1,009                | 24.3 | 398                                  | 28.1 | 1,510                                 | 47.9 |
| 2005 | 216                             | 44.0 | 19                           | 52.6 | 1,001                | 32.3 | 575                                  | 27.7 | 1,968                                 | 44.9 |
| 2006 | 233                             | 44.6 | 25                           | 36.0 | 994                  | 37.7 | 991                                  | 25.4 | 2,398                                 | 47.5 |
| 2007 | 251                             | 49.0 | 31                           | 67.7 | 1,011                | 35.0 | 641                                  | 33.1 | 2,522                                 | 45.5 |

Source: Korea Ministry of Government Administration, Yearbook of Ministry of Government Administration, Civil Service Commission, Korea Ministry of Public Administration and Security.

***Korean GEM 64<sup>th</sup> among 93 countries***

GDI (Gender-related Development Index) refers to the indicator which is used for recognizing the degree of gender equality though average life expectancy, literacy rate,

increases in women representatives and women’s in professional and technical occupations respectively, but women’s wage to men’s decreased by 0.08. It is noticeable that gender equality in Korea in development of human resources is improved in terms of the

result from GDI and GEM, but there is no improvement in the utilization of human resources.

&lt;Table 9&gt;

### Gender-related Development Index Rank in Korea

Unit: Rank, Year, \$

| Year | GDI Rank | Life Expectancy at Birth (years) |      | Adult Literacy Rate (%) |      | Combined Gross Enrolment Ratio for Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Education (%) |      | Estimated Earned Income(PPP US\$) |        | HDI Rank |
|------|----------|----------------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|--|------|-----------------------------------|--------|----------|
|      |          | Female                           | Male | Female                  | Male | Female   | Male | Female                            | Male   |          |
| 2000 | 30       | 76.2                             | 69.0 | 95.9                    | 99.0 | 84   | 94   | 8,342                             | 18,529 | 31       |
| 2005 | 27       | 80.6                             | 73.3 | 99.9                    | 99.9 | 87   | 100  | 11,698                            | 24,167 | 28       |
| 2007 | 26       | 81.5                             | 74.3 | 99.9                    | 99.9 | 89   | 102  | 12,531                            | 31,476 | 26       |

Note: GDI member countries – 143 nations in 2000, 144 nations in 2005, and 157 nations in 2007.

Source: UNDP. Human Development Report (2000, 2005, and 2007).

&lt;Table 10&gt;

### Gender Empowerment Index Rank in Korea

Unit: Rank, Year, %

| Year | GEM Rank | Seats in parliament held by women (%) | Female legislators, senior officials and managers (%) | Female professional and technical workers (%) | Ratio of estimated female to male earned income |
|------|----------|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| 2003 | 63       | 5.9                                   | 5   | 34  | 0.46  |
| 2005 | 59       | 13.0                                  | 6   | 39  | 0.48  |
| 2007 | 64       | 13.4                                  | 8   | 39  | 0.40  |

Note: GEM member countries – 70 nations in 2003, 78 nations in 2004, 80 nations in 2004, and 93 nations in 2007.

Source: UNDP. Human Development Report (2003, 2005, and 2007).