Research in Brief

Recent Changes in the Industrial and Occupational Characteristics of Social Service Jobs[1]

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Introduction

Social service jobs have since the mid-2000s held the spotlight as a policy tool with which to navigate through the challenge of jobless growth. The demand for social services grew even as, as has been shown in recent years, growth slowed and both unemployment and employment insecurity remained high. The Korea Employment Information Service in its Mid-and-Long-Term Manpower Supply Outlook 2020~2030 (2021) has presented social services as a promising industry with ample potential to lead job creation in times such as now of rapid population aging.

Korea's social service sector is likely to grow further as the current government has placed on its national agenda a large number of policy items concerning social service jobs in the care and health industry. Since achieving such government goals—upgrading welfare and care services through reform of the social service sector, reinforcing the systems of care and employment as befitting the age of centenarians, fostering conditions for safe and good-quality child-rearing, making Korea into a society without discrimination by providing people with disabilities with

1) This brief is an amended extract from A Compilation of Statistics on Social Service Jobs (2021) authored by Suran Ahn and Tae−Jung Ha.

well-coordinated customized services, to mention just a few—requires a still further ramp-up of the workforce who would provide users with in-person services, the attention fastened on social service jobs is likely to remain strong in the years to come.

There is a pronounced need, however, for efforts to create not just jobs, but quality jobs, by way of improving on the current social jobs policy, which, implemented with the aim of "industrializing social services" and "job creation", has, as some have claimed, been churning out low-quality jobs.

This study broadly examines how social service jobs have changed in their characteristics in terms in particular of quantity and quality and draws out some implications for the improvement of the social services policy.

The data used for the analysis of social service jobs

For operational purposes, this study divided social service jobs into two domains: the industrial and the occupational. The industrial domain encompasses, as shown in Table 1, services that are essentially social services ("core" industry) and a category of activities that are considered an extension of social services ("related" industry).

The criterion used for our classification of the industrial domain is an amended version of the Social Service Industrial Special Code (SSISC) developed in 2013. The SSISC as employed in this study classifies social services into 7 large groups: comprehensive social service businesses; care service businesses; health support businesses; educational and capacity-building related social services; culture and sports facility services; social participation support services; and administrative work. The occupational domain is composed of the 15 most commonly held jobs that fall under each of the two industry categories.

We used the National Establishment Survey (2016~2019) for the analysis of the industrial characteristics of social welfare jobs, and the Regional Employment Survey (2016~2020) for the analysis of the occupational characteristics.

[Table 1] Social service jobs in operationally defined categories

	Industrial domain		Occupational domain
	Social Service Industrial Special Code (SSISC)	Korean Standard Industrial Classification (KSIC)	
Core industrial category	• Comprehensive social service businesses • Care service businesses • Health support businesses	• Human health and social work activities (Q)	• Core industrial category under the KSIC *Hospital activities (861), medical and dental practice activities (863), other human health activities (869), residential welfare facilities (871), non-residential welfare facilities (872)
Related industrial category	• Education and training related social services • Culture and sports facility services • Social participation support services • Administrative work related to social services	• Business facilities management and business support services; rental and leasing activities (N) • Education (P) • Public administration and defense; compulsory social security (O) • Arts, sports and recreation related services (R) • Membership organizations, repair and other personal services (S)	Activities of employment placement agencies and provision of human resources (751); administration of industrial and social policy of community (842); pre-primary and primary education (851); secondary education (853); special schools, foreign schools, alternative schools (854); other educational institutes (856); creative arts and related services (901); library, historical sites and buildings and similar recreation related services (902); sports services (911); amusement parks and other recreation activities (912); other personal service activities (969)

Source: Authors' tabulation

The industrial characteristics of social service jobs

The number of establishments in the social service sector reached 232,000 in 2019, up by 7.9 percent from 215,000 in 2016, with the number of people working in the sector rising from 3.461 million to 3.906 million. There were more establishments in the core industry category (65 percent) than there were in the related industry category. The core industry category overtook the related industry category in terms of workforce size in 2019 as the growth in the number of workers in the former began outpacing that in

the latter in 2016.

[Figure 1] The number of establishments and of workers in the social service industry (2016~2019)
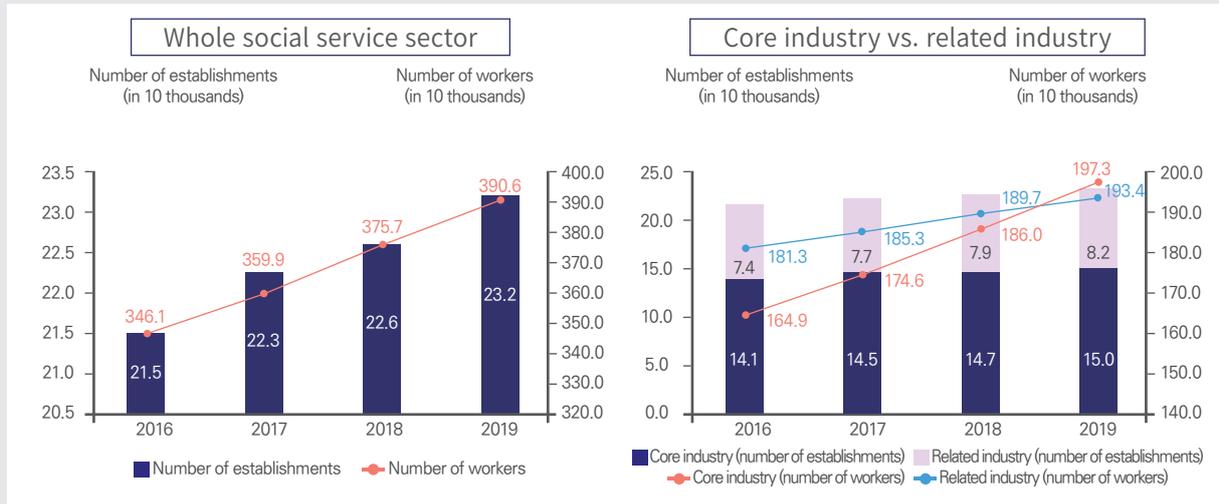
Source: Ahn, Suran; Ha, Tae-Jung. A Compilation of Statistics on Social Service Jobs. pp. 89–91.

Of these establishments, those with one-to-four workers and those with five-to-nine workers constituted the majority. The share of establishments with four or fewer workers dipped from 39.9 percent in 2019 from 42.6 percent in 2016 in the core industry category, while climbing to 53.4 percent from 51.2 percent in the related industry category.

[Figure 2] Distribution of establishments, by size (2016~2019), in %
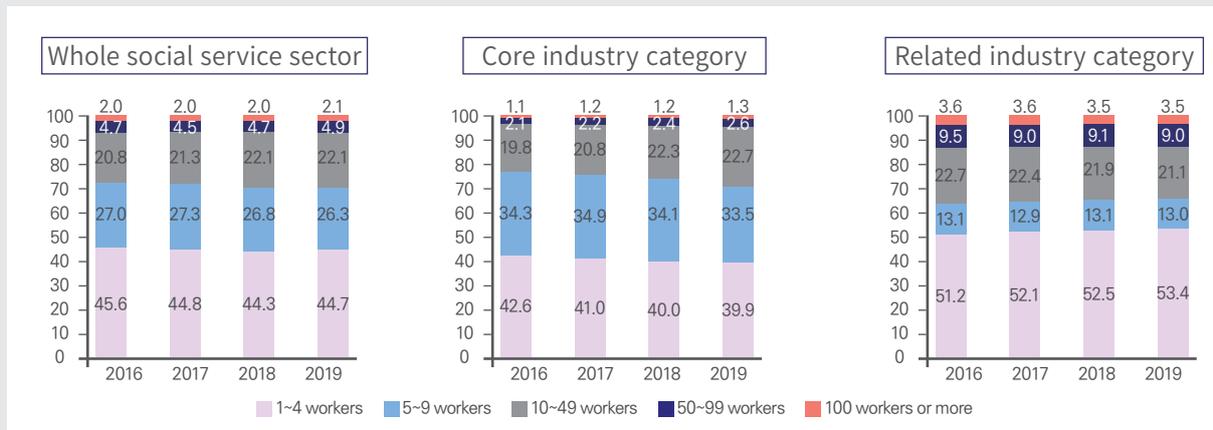
Source: Statistics Korea. National Establishment Survey (for 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019).

Sole proprietors accounted for 63.0 percent of all social service establishments in 2019. In the core industry category, the share of sole proprietors began declining from 77.9 percent in 2016, but was still high at 72.7 percent in 2019. In the related industry category, which contains "education and training related social services" and "administrative work related to social services", sole proprietors accounted for the most proportion, as was the case with the core industry category. In the related industry category, however, entities affiliated to the national or local governments accounted for a relatively high proportion, at the 20s-percent range.

[Figure 3] Distribution of establishments in the social service sector (2016~2019), by organization type, in %
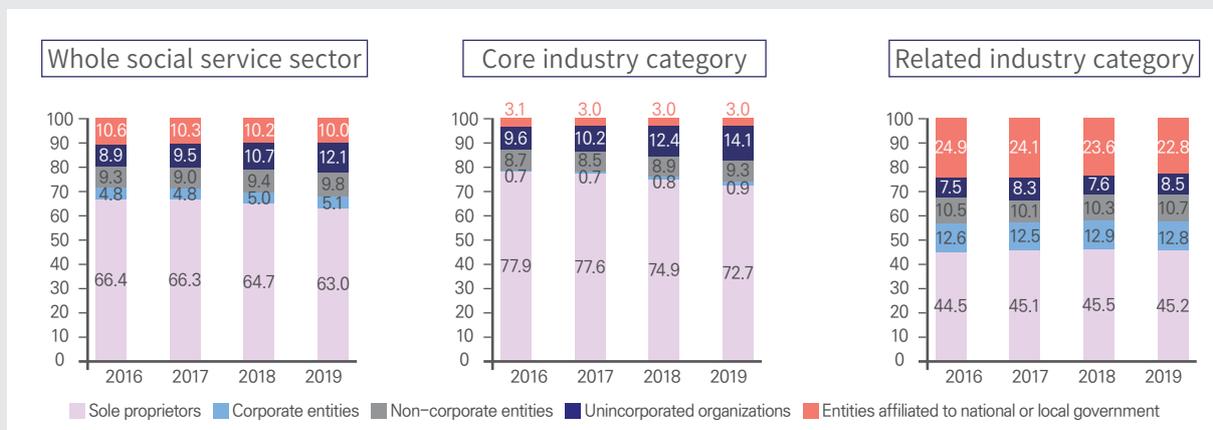
Source: Ahn, Suran; Ha, Tae-Jung. A Compilation of Statistics on Social Service Jobs. pp. 44–45.

The occupational characteristics of social service jobs

Table 2 lists 15 most common social service jobs that fall under each of the core and related industry categories. Among the most common social service professions are jobs that involve provision of in-person services to users (personal care workers in health services and social welfare-related service workers) and those having to do with supporting the provision of social services (managerial clerks and administrative clerks). Some occupations may well figure in both the core and related industry categories, as do "cleaners and sanitation workers" and "business administration and office clerks".

[Table 2] The 15 most common jobs in each of the core and related industry categories for 2020

	15 most common jobs (as listed in accordance with KSIC-based classification)
Core industry category	"Caregiving and health service workers", "cleaners and sanitation workers", "social welfare service related workers", "health and medical service related workers", "nurses", "therapists, pathologists, and medical technologists", "cooks", "medical diagnosis and treatment professionals", "business administration and office clerks", "other service related elementary workers", "other caregiving, health and personal service workers", "food preparation related elementary workers", " "agriculture, forestry and fishery related elementary workers", "travel agent, information and reception clerks", "automobile drivers"
Related industry category	"School teachers", "cleaners and sanitation workers", "liberal arts, technical and arts instructors", "administrative clerks", "leisure services workers", "business administration and office clerks", "building concierges and ticket examiners", "cooks", "college professors and instructors", "other service related elementary workers", "sports and recreation related professionals", "caregiving and health service workers", "construction and mining laborers", "kindergarten teachers", "automobile drivers"

Note: 1) The professions listed are in descending order of the number of individuals employed.
2) The professions underlined are those appearing in both industry categories.
3) The phrase "construction and mining laborers" was crossed out and left out of consideration because it refers to people who are deemed to engage in occupational activities that have little to do with social service.

Source: Ahn, Suran; Ha, Tae-Jung. A Compilation of Statistics on Social Service Jobs (2021). p. 27.

Social service jobs are found to be held more by women. The proportion of women in the most common jobs in the core industry category was high at over 80 percent for the years examined. With women accounting for nearly or greater than 90 percent of "caregiving and health service workers", "social welfare service related workers", "nurses", "health and medical service related workers" and "cooks", it becomes obvious that the social service sector has been a key driving force behind women's increasing labor market participation.

[Figure 4] Distribution of women and men in the most common social service jobs

% of women in the social service sector, by industry category

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Core industry	82.9	84.0	82.3	82.6	82.9
Whole social service industry	66.5	67.4	67.9	67.7	67.8
Related industry	59.7	59.5	59.8	60.1	59.4

- Whole social service industry
- Core industry
- Related industry

Distribution of men and women (2020): core industry

(Men / Women)

Occupation	Men	Women
Caregiving and health service workers (421)	6.2	93.8
Social welfare service related workers (247)	11.0	89.0
Nurses (243)	5.8	94.2
Cleaners and sanitation workers (941)	27.4	72.6
Health and medical service related workers (246)	5.2	94.8
Therapists, pathologists, and medical technologists (245)	28.1	72.6
Medical diagnosis and treatment professionals (241)	72.3	27.7
Business administration and office clerks (321)	45.4	54.7
Other service related elementary workers (999)	42.2	57.8
Cooks (441)	1.4	98.6

Distribution of men and women (2020): related industry

Occupation	Men	Women
School teachers (252)	32.6	67.4
Cleaners and sanitation workers (941)	19.6	80.4
Liberal arts, technical and arts instructors (254)	24.0	76.0
Business administration and office clerks (321)	48.8	51.2
Leisure services workers (432)	54.1	45.9
Administrative clerks (311)	45.9	54.2
Building concierges and ticket examiners (942)	99.1	0.9
Sports and recreation related professionals (286)	62.4	37.6
College professors and instructors (251)	64.8	35.2
Other service related elementary workers (999)	44.6	55.4

■ Men ■ Women

Note: 1) "Whole social service sector" refers to all the workers belonging to the occupational subgroups as defined by the 3–digit classification code under the Korea Standard Industry Code (KSIC).

2) We considered 15 most common jobs for industry–wise analysis, and 10 most common jobs for occupation–wise analysis.

Source: Ahn, Suran; Ha, Tae–Jung. A Compilation of Statistics on Social Service Jobs (2021). pp. 118–126.

The percentage of regular employees was higher in the core industry category than in the related industry category. Over the years, however, the share of temporary and part-time employment has grown. As of 2020, over 90 percent of "other service related elementary workers" and "cleaners and sanitation workers", both in the core industry category, and 42.7 percent of "caregiving and health service workers", were in temporary or part-time employment. In the related industry category, the share of temporary or part-time employment was particularly high in "liberal arts, technical and arts instructors", "leisure services workers", "sports and recreation related professionals."

[Figure 5] Age distribution of workers in the most common social service jobs

Age distribution, by industry (2016~2020): core industry

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
50 and older	33.9	36.9	39.6	43.8	47.4
30~49	45.1	43.9	41.5	39.2	37.0
15~29	21.0	19.2	18.9	16.9	15.6

Age distribution, by industry (2016~2020): related industry

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
50 and older	41.4	41.1	40.5	41.7	43.5
30~49	44.0	44.6	44.8	43.6	43.0
15~29	14.6	14.3	14.7	14.8	13.6

Age distribution, by occupation (2020): core industry

Occupation	15~29	30~49	50 and older
Caregiving and health service workers (421)	2.4	16.7	81.0
Social welfare service related workers (247)	18.7	59.5	21.8
Nurses (243)	34.9	50.5	14.6
Cleaners and sanitation workers (941)	1.1	2.3	96.6
Health and medical service related workers (246)	21.8	55.9	22.3
Therapists, pathologists, and medical technologists (245)	40.3	51.3	8.4
Medical diagnosis and treatment professionals (241)	6.2	60.3	33.6
Business administration and office clerks (321)	23.7	54.3	22.0
Other service related elementary workers (999)	3.8	5.4	90.8
Cooks (441)	2.3	25.7	72.0

Age distribution, by occupation (2020): related industry

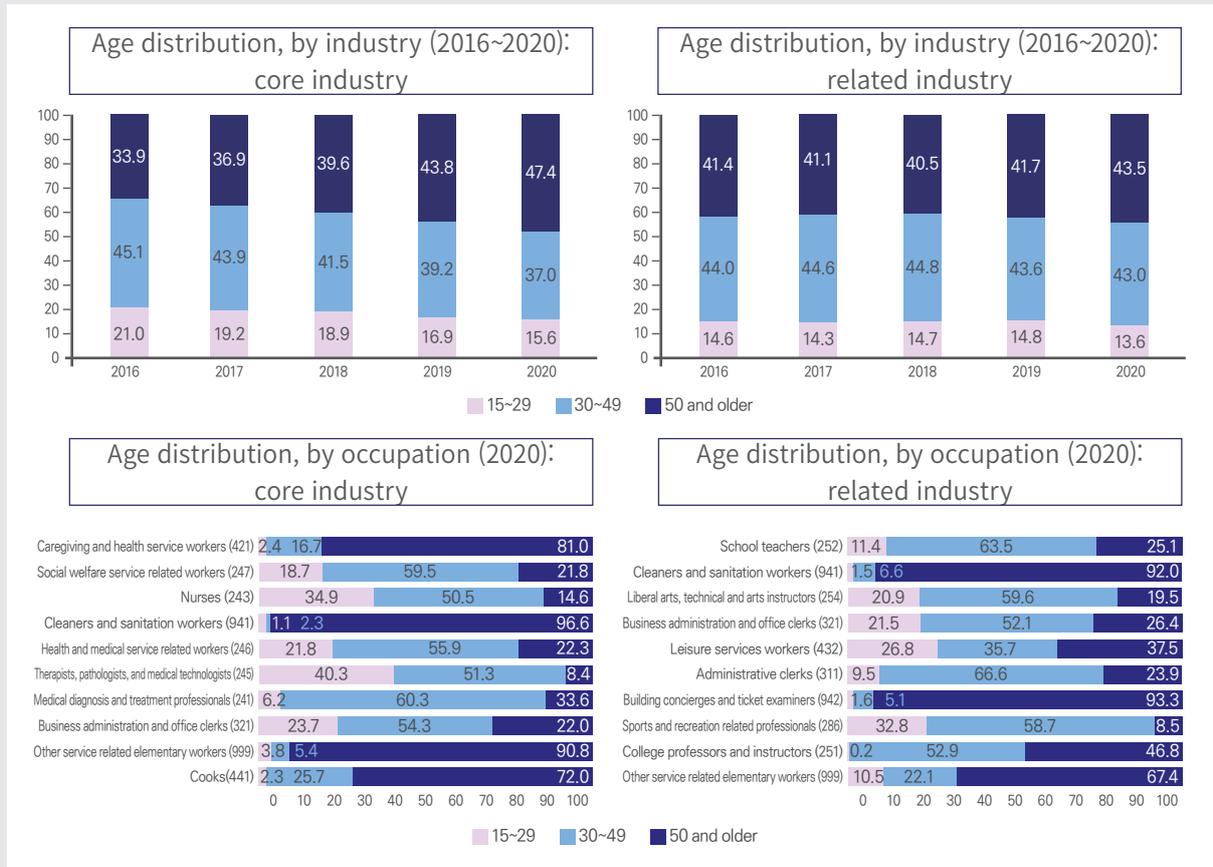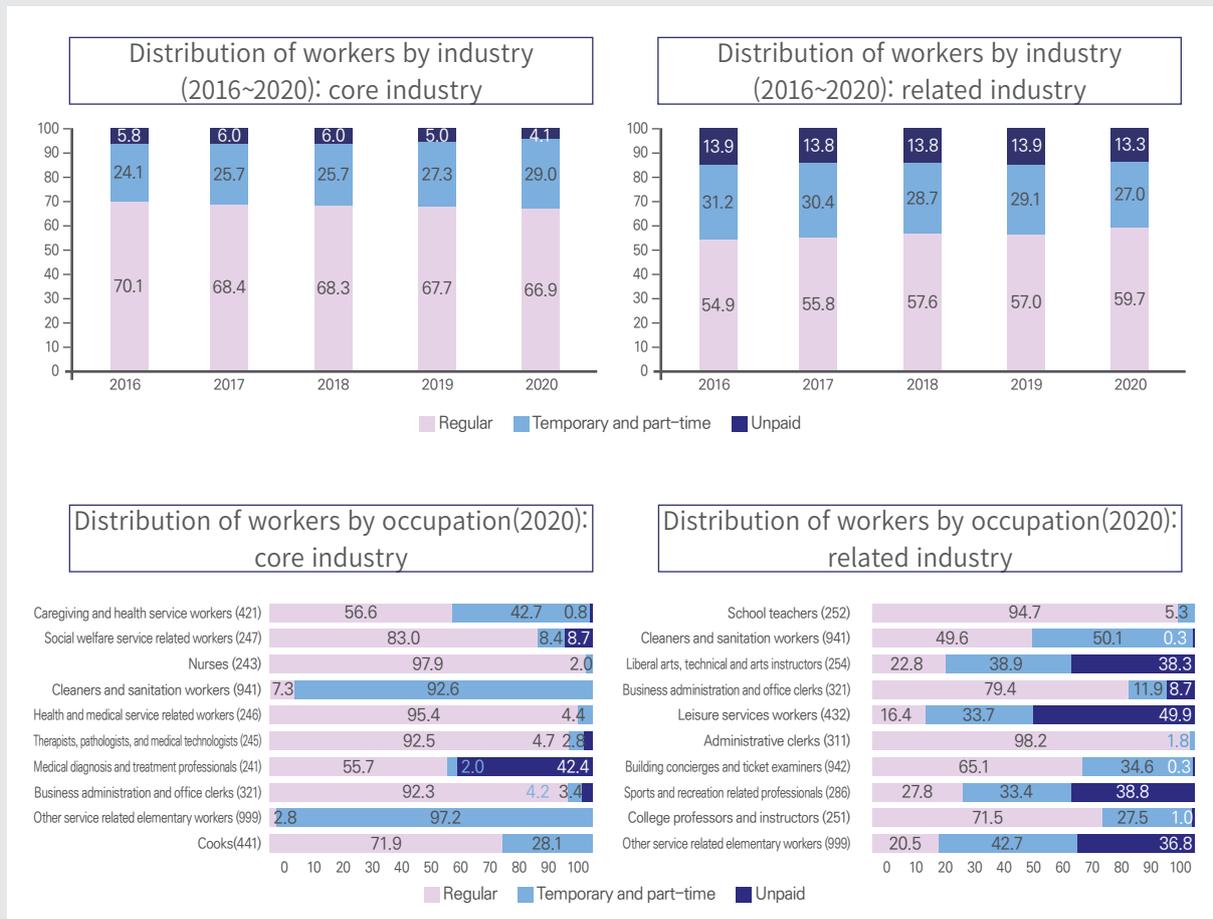| Occupation	15~29	30~49	50 and older
School teachers (252)	11.4	63.5	25.1
Cleaners and sanitation workers (941)	1.5	6.6	92.0
Liberal arts, technical and arts instructors (254)	20.9	59.6	19.5
Business administration and office clerks (321)	21.5	52.1	26.4
Leisure services workers (432)	26.8	35.7	37.5
Administrative clerks (311)	9.5	66.6	23.9
Building concierges and ticket examiners (942)	1.6	5.1	93.3
Sports and recreation related professionals (286)	32.8	58.7	8.5
College professors and instructors (251)	0.2	52.9	46.8
Other service related elementary workers (999)	10.5	22.1	67.4

Note: 1) "Whole social service sector" refers to all the workers belonging to the occupational subgroups as defined by the 3-digit classification code under the Korea Standard Industry Code (KSIC).

2) We considered 15 most common jobs for industry-wise analysis, and 10 most common jobs for occupation-wise analysis.

Source: Ahn, Suran; Ha, Tae-Jung. A Compilation of Statistics on Social Service Jobs (2021). pp. 118–126.

The percentage of regular employees was higher in the core industry category than in the related industry category. Over the years, however, the share of temporary and part-time employment has grown. As of 2020, over 90 percent of "other service related elementary workers" and "cleaners and sanitation workers", both in the core industry category, and 42.7 percent of "caregiving and health service workers", were in temporary or part-time employment. In the related industry category, the share of temporary or part-time employment was particularly high in "liberal arts, technical and arts instructors", "leisure services workers", "sports and recreation related professionals."

[Figure 6] Distribution of workers in the most common jobs in the social service sector, by employment status

Distribution of workers by industry (2016~2020): core industry

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Unpaid	5.8	6.0	6.0	5.0	4.1
Temporary and part-time	24.1	25.7	25.7	27.3	29.0
Regular	70.1	68.4	68.3	67.7	66.9

Distribution of workers by industry (2016~2020): related industry

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Unpaid	13.9	13.8	13.8	13.9	13.3
Temporary and part-time	31.2	30.4	28.7	29.1	27.0
Regular	54.9	55.8	57.6	57.0	59.7

■ Regular ■ Temporary and part-time ■ Unpaid

Distribution of workers by occupation(2020): core industry

Occupation	Regular	Temporary and part-time	Unpaid
Caregiving and health service workers (421)	56.6	42.7	0.8
Social welfare service related workers (247)	83.0	8.4	8.7
Nurses (243)	97.9		2.0
Cleaners and sanitation workers (941)	7.3	92.6	
Health and medical service related workers (246)	95.4		4.4
Therapists, pathologists, and medical technologists (245)	92.5	4.7	2.8
Medical diagnosis and treatment professionals (241)	55.7	2.0	42.4
Business administration and office clerks (321)	92.3	4.2	3.4
Other service related elementary workers (999)	2.8	97.2	
Cooks(441)	71.9	28.1	

Distribution of workers by occupation(2020): related industry

Occupation	Regular	Temporary and part-time	Unpaid
School teachers (252)	94.7		5.3
Cleaners and sanitation workers (941)	49.6	50.1	0.3
Liberal arts, technical and arts instructors (254)	22.8	38.9	38.3
Business administration and office clerks (321)	79.4	11.9	8.7
Leisure services workers (432)	16.4	33.7	49.9
Administrative clerks (311)	98.2		1.8
Building concierges and ticket examiners (942)	65.1	34.6	0.3
Sports and recreation related professionals (286)	27.8	33.4	38.8
College professors and instructors (251)	71.5	27.5	1.0
Other service related elementary workers (999)	20.5	42.7	36.8

■ Regular ■ Temporary and part-time ■ Unpaid

Note: 1) "Whole social service sector" refers to all the workers belonging to the occupational subgroups as defined by the 3-digit classification code under the Korea Standard Industry Code (KSIC).

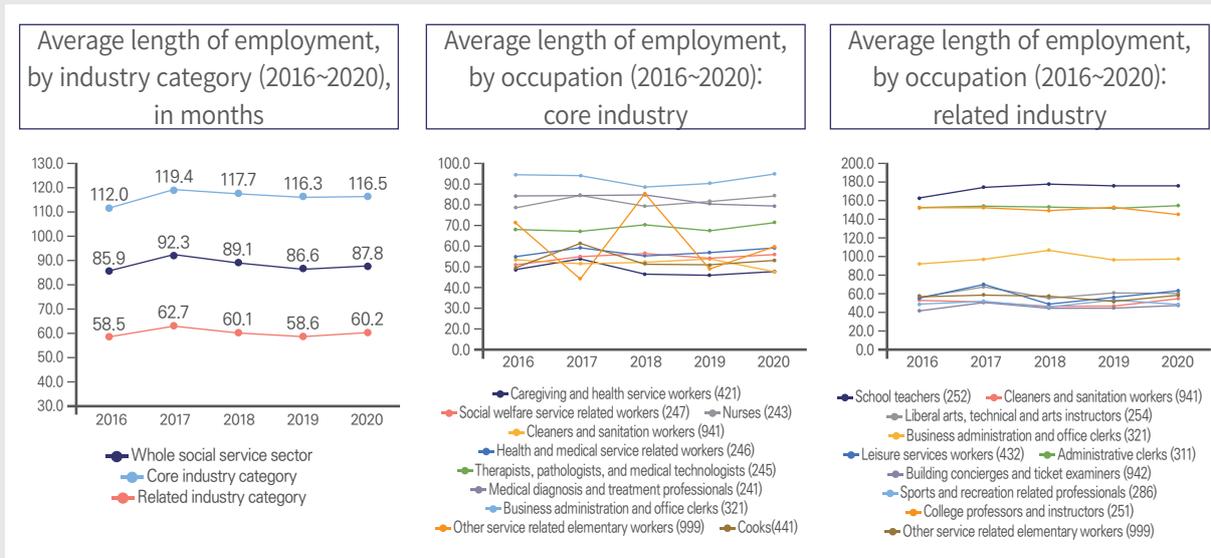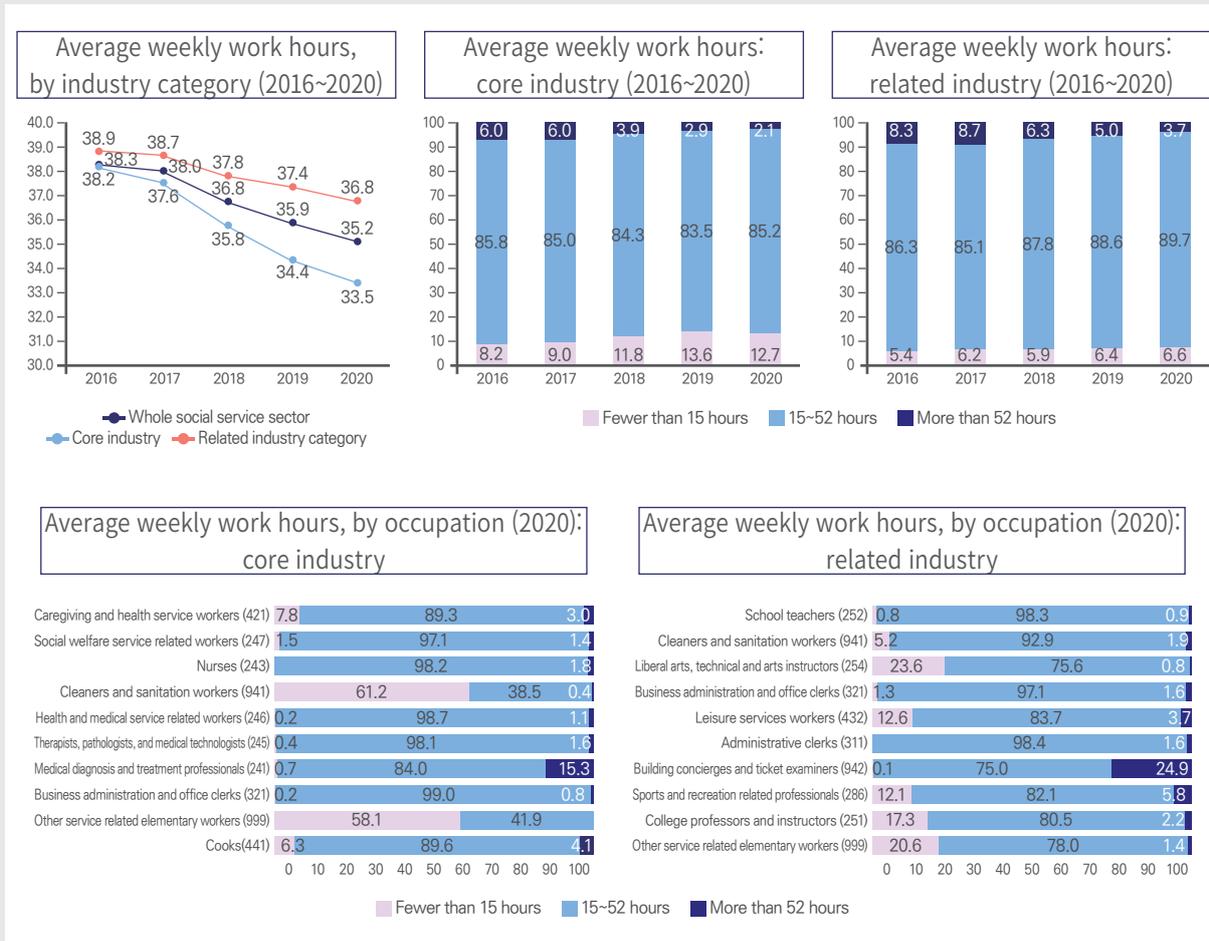2) We considered 15 most common jobs for industry-wise analysis, and 10 most common jobs for occupation-wise analysis.

Source: Ahn, Suran; Ha, Tae-Jung. A Compilation of Statistics on Social Service Jobs (2021). pp. 133–140.

The average length of continuous employment for regular employees decreased in 2019 after having increased between 2016 and 2017, and increased again in 2020. Regular employees in the related industry category were found to stay employed 1.9 times longer on average than their counterparts in the core industry category.

A noteworthy pattern of differences emerged in the average length of employment for the most common jobs in the core industry category. In the health care field, for example, the average length of employment tended to vary according to something of an occupational hierarchy, with "medical diagnosis and treatment professionals" having the greatest length of employment, followed in descending order by "nurses", "therapists, pathologists and medical technologists", "health and medical service related workers". Differences in the average length of employment were greater between jobs

in the health care field than between jobs in the social welfare service field. In the case of the related industry category, differences in the average length of regular employment was particularly noticeable between jobs that fall under the education service area and between those in the field of cultural and sports facilities services.

[Figure 7] The average length of employment for regular employees in the most common jobs in the social service sector

Note: 1) "Whole social service sector" refers to all the workers belonging to the occupational subgroups as defined by the 3–digit classification code under the Korea Standard Industry Code (KSIC).
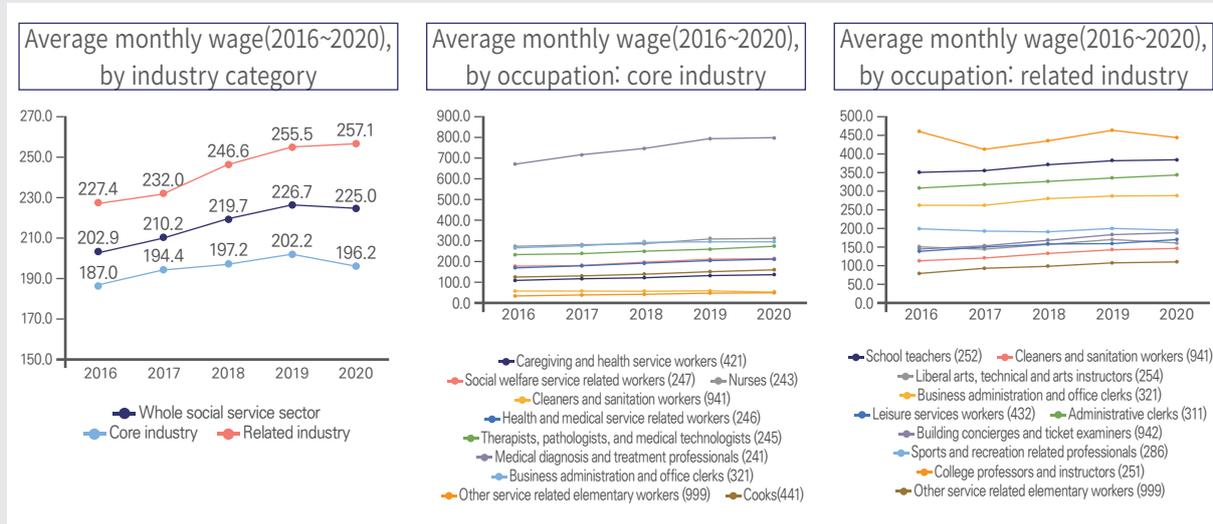
2) We considered 15 most common jobs for industry–wise analysis, and 10 most common jobs for occupation–wise analysis.

Source: Ahn, Suran; Ha, Tae–Jung. A Compilation of Statistics on Social Service Jobs (2021). pp. 165–166.

Wage employees in the most common occupations in both the core and related industries were found to have spent at work a weekly average of 35.2 hours in 2020, down from 38.3 hours in 2016. The fall in the share of people working long hours, observed throughout the jobs most commonly found in both the core and related industry categories, is assumed to reflect the effect of the 52-hour week that went into force in 2018. In the core industry category, the declining proportion of long-hours workers is accompanied by a marked increase in the share of employees working very short hours (15 hours a week or less).

[Figure 8] The distribution of work-hours for wage employees in the most common jobs in the social service sector, in hours and %

Note: 1) "Whole social service sector" refers to all the workers belonging to the occupational subgroups as defined by the 3-digit classification code under the Korea Standard Industry Code (KSIC).

2) We considered 15 most common jobs for industry-wise analysis, and 10 most common jobs for occupation-wise analysis.

Source: Ahn, Suran; Ha, Tae-Jung. A Compilation of Statistics on Social Service Jobs (2021). pp. 153-162.

The average monthly wage for workers in the most common occupations amounted in 2020 to KRW1.962 million for the core industry category and to KRW2.571 million for the related industry category. The rise in the average wage has been sharper in the related industry category. The average wage for "caregiving and health service workers", who account for the largest occupational segment in the core industry category, was as low as 57.5 percent of the average wage of all workers employed in the social service sector. The average monthly wage in the core industry category has declined in 2020, presumably as a result of the drop in wage for "cleaners and sanitation workers," the only occupational group in all those working in the most common occupations who saw a wage decline. "Cleaners and sanitation workers" in the related social service sector, on the other hand, saw their wage levels rise in the same period. Another point meriting attention is that there has over the years been an increasing

wage gap between "medical diagnosis and treatment professionals" and workers in other occupations.

[Figure 9] Average monthly wage of workers in the most common occupations in the social service sector (in KRW10,000)

Note: 1) "Whole social service sector" refers to all the workers belonging to the occupational subgroups as defined by the 3-digit classification code under the Korea Standard Industry Code (KSIC).

2) We considered 15 most common jobs for industry-wise analysis, and 10 most common jobs for occupation-wise analysis.

Source: Ahn, Suran; Ha, Tae-Jung. A Compilation of Statistics on Social Service Jobs (2021). pp. 151–152.

Concluding remarks

Korea's social service policy has since its inception been geared to engaging the private sector in the prompt building of social service infrastructure. The growth thus far of social services jobs of all kinds can be construed to have arisen from such policy efforts. Further growth is likely on the way in the social service sector, especially in such areas as caregiving, long-term care, health and employment, as Korean society commits more if its resources toward better responding to newly emerging social risks. The social service sector will work toward improving on its current sole-proprietor-oriented service delivery system, with an eye toward improving the quality of services, and more jobs will be created in the process.

Workers in the core industry category have spearheaded the growth of the social service industry. However, they remain poorly compensated. Most social service occupations have seen an increase in the proportion of low-wage, short-hours jobs, which, with their high employment insecurity, are not regarded as jobs with career potential. In addition, the ongoing aging of the population may well create shortages in the long run in the supply of social service workforce.

In the social services industry, where in-person relationship is paramount in the delivery of services, improvements in the quality of jobs can feed through to high-quality services and, in turn, to new

demands for service, fostering as a result conditions that are conducive to increased employment.

The question of how to bring about innovation and improvements in social services is one that must be preceded by improvement in the quality of social service jobs. Policymakers should consider improving the current policy on the social service workforce with full recognition of how diverse and heterogeneous social services are and can be, because any efforts that are taken to create social service jobs from the perspective of treating them as social jobs intended merely for socially vulnerable groups would likely pursue gains in the quantity of employment creation at the expense of quality in the jobs so created. In the longer-term, there is a need for reshaping the current social service employment policy into a social service workforce reinforcement policy by which not only to generate quantity gains in social service jobs, but also to improve a comprehensive set of support programs aimed at nurturing, educating, retraining and retaining social service workers.