

## Korean Cyber University Students' Needs for Gerocounseling

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**ABSTRACT** : This study aimed to inspire students to be interested in counseling for the elderly to help them in their career search, and to provide basic data for developing a high-quality educational program for gerocounseling professionals. As a result of analyzing a total of 365 data collected through an online survey conducted for 3 weeks, more than 90% of students were interested in gerocounseling, 60-85% for each subject of gerocounseling, and 50-75% for each desired gerocounseling institution. On the other hand, the degree of preparation for gerocounseling was considered to be inadequate, at 30-50% for each area. And more than 75% of them were willing to participate in specialized programs of gerocounseling in the future. On the other hand, there was no difference in the needs for gerocounseling of cyber college students according to gender, age, or living with the elderly. Based on these research results, the implications and limitations were described.

**KEYWORDS** : Aging society, counseling for elderly, gerocounseling, specialized program, needs for gerocounseling

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### I. INTRODUCTION

According to the "2020 Elderly Statistics" recently reported by the National Statistical Office, as of 2019, the elderly population in Korea was passing through an aged society, accounting for 15.7 percent of the total population, and will enter a super-aged society with 20.3 percent in 2025. [1]. The increase of the elderly population is accompanied by various problems that are difficult to solve by the elderly alone, such as health problems, poverty problems, alienation problems and loss of socioeconomic roles [2]. These problems cause the emotional and psychological difficulties of the elderly to deepen. The number of diagnoses and treatments for elderly depression, which not only serves as an indicator of elderly suicide but also causes various elderly diseases, continues to increase [1]. In particular, Korea's suicide rate among senior citizens has long been at the top of the OECD, an example of the great psychological problems of senior citizens [3].

Despite the fact that the mental health of the elderly is at such a serious level, Korea's elderly policy is mainly implemented on a welfare basis [4]. In recent years, instead of considering all 65 years of age and older as senior citizens due to their extended lifespan, some age 65 to 75 years of age is classified as young-old, middle-aged to 80 years of age and older as old-old [5]. The detailed classification of the elderly period means that the circumstances and needs of the elderly are different according to the period, suggesting that psychological support is needed for each period. In particular, in the case of young seniors who have economic power, psychological support will be required rather than the welfare service centered on the elderly currently provided. Therefore, the demand for counselors for young old is expected to increase. In fact, as the baby boomers enter the elderly age, interest in mental health services and professional counselors for the elderly is increasing in countries such as Australia and the United States [6][7].

Gerocounseling is the process of helping the elderly in need to successfully lead their retirement by sharing information with the trained counselor and helping them achieve human growth in terms of thinking, emotion and behavior [5]. So far, gerocounseling has not received much attention compared to counseling for children or youth. Until recently, counselors have dismissed mental health problems of the elderly as part of aging or questioned the effectiveness of counseling for the elderly [6]. In addition, senior citizens tend to seek physical specialists rather than seek professional counselors when psychological problems occurred, and to show distrust and fear of counseling effects. [8-11]. For this reason, gerocounseling has not been acknowledged as a special career among professional psychologists. However, several studies show that various counseling sessions using positive psychotherapy, reality therapy, play therapy, mindfulness, recollection, and autobiography are effective in overcoming psychological difficulties such as reducing depression, preventing suicide, and improving life satisfaction in the elderly [12-21]. Therefore, in an aging society where the elderly population continues to increase, the expansion of the basis of counseling for the elderly is an essential demand of the times.

In Korea, there was relatively little interest in counseling for senior citizens, and as a result of the welfare counseling centered on social workers due to the elderly policy of a welfare approach, there was little research on elderly counseling experts. The counseling willingness of prospective counselors at a time when they are trained as experts are closely related to the characteristics of their preferred physician since becoming an expert [6]. In addition, the overall interest in counseling for the elderly, the level of self-awareness, the willingness to train and the degree to which university students consider important are the predictors who decide their career path to become senior counselors in the future [22]. At a time when demand for gerocounseling experts is expected to increase in the future, it is a very urgent task to examine the interests or intention of gerocounseling, and necessary curriculum of undergraduate and graduate students currently majoring in counseling.

As of 2020, there are a total of 21 cyber universities in Korea. Most cyber universities have counseling psychology departments, and counseling graduate school. Compared to offline based universities, students at cyber universities are relatively older and have various life experiences. Counseling for the elderly requires a counselor who has years of experience and life experience who can understand the life experiences of the elderly and have conversations at the same level. In fact, studies have shown that older people prefer older counselors [11]. This shows that cyber university students may be more suitable for counseling for elderly than offline university students who are relatively younger. Therefore, this study aims to provide basic data necessary to train gerocounseling experts by surveying the needs for counseling for elderly among undergraduates and graduate students majoring in counseling psychology at cyber universities.

Meanwhile, studies have shown that demographic variables, empirical factors and psychological factors are important factors affecting the willingness to follow gerocounseling career, and that the older the age, the higher the desire for gerocounseling and the stronger the willingness of male students to counsel senior citizens than female students [6]. In this regard, we will investigate whether there are differences in the level of interest in counseling for senior citizens depending on gender, age, and cohabitation of the elderly.

The research questions according to the necessity and purpose of this study are as follows:

First, what are the needs of cyber university students for counseling for the elderly?

Second, is there a difference in the gerocounseling needs of cyber university students according to their age, gender, and cohabitation with the elderly?

## **II. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **2.1 Research subject**

This study was conducted with 365 undergraduate and graduate students (77 males and 288 females) enrolled in S Cyber University in Seoul. Their ages were 20s 21 (5.8%), 30s 51 (14%), 40s 157 (43%), 50s 113 (31%), and 60s 23 (6.3%).

### **2.2 Measurement tool**

#### **2.2.1 Needs for gerocounseling questionnaire**

To measure the needs for gerocounseling, a questionnaire developed by Foster, Kreider & Waugh was referenced [7]. This questionnaire has two parts. First, questions were included to determine demographic characteristics such as age, gender, grade, occupation, marital status, and the presence or absence of living with the elderly. In the second part, questions asking general interest in counseling for the elderly, questions asking interest in the topic of counseling for the elderly, the institution where you want to work in counseling for the elderly, the extent to which you are currently in the field of counseling for the elderly, participate in a specialized course for counseling for the elderly. It was composed of questions asking the degree of wanting and the importance of the content the counselor should know when counseling for the elderly. Each question is composed of a 5-point Likert scale.

### **2.3 Research procedure**

The data collection for this study took place over a total of 3 weeks from September 27, 2020 to October 18, 2020. During this period, the needs for gerocounseling questionnaire produced for this study was produced using the Naver Office form and distributed to students. Links to online questionnaires were posted on social media of students which were the subjects of the study, and encouraged students to voluntarily participate. A total of 365 students participated, and the data they responded were analyzed.

### **2.4 Data analysis**

Data analysis was performed as follows using IBM statistics SPSS 21. Frequency analysis and descriptive statistics analysis were conducted to investigate the need for counseling for the elderly. Next, a  $\chi^2$  test was conducted to determine the difference between demographic characteristics and needs for gerocounseling.

III. RESULTS

3.1 Demographic characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the study participants are summarized in [Table 1]. In terms of gender, 77 (21.1%) males and 288 (78.9%) females were 20s 21 (5.8%) in their, 51 (14%) in their 30s, and 157 (43%) in their 40s, 113 (31%) in their 50s and 23 (6.3%) in their 60s. The first grade was 36 students (10%), second year 18 students (5.0%), third year 95 students (26.3%), fourth year 59 students (16.2%), and graduate students 153 students (41.9%).

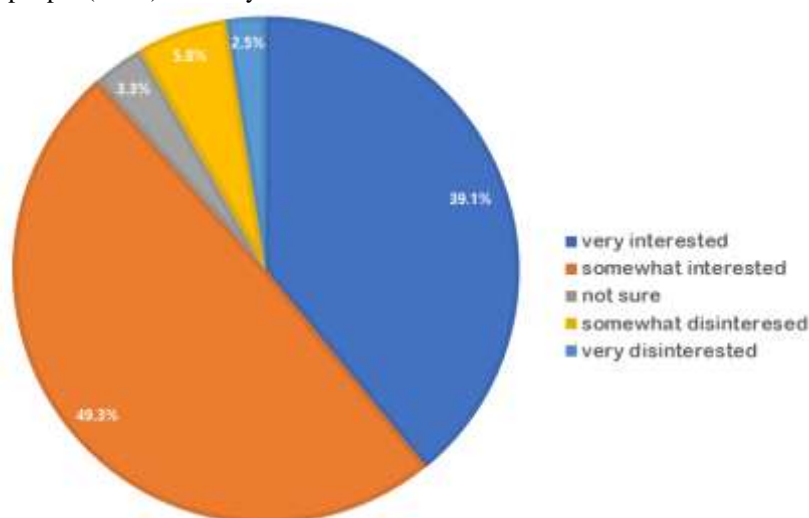
[Table 1] Demographic Characteristics

	Number(%)		Number(%)		
Gender	Male	77(21.1)	married	254(69.8%)	
	Female	288(78.9)		non	79(21.7%)
Age	20	21(5.8%)	Marriage	divorce	31(8.5%)
	30	51(14%)		death	-
	40	157(43%)		cohabitation	-
	50	113(31%)		etc	-
	60	23(6.3%)			
Grade	1	36(10%)	Job	Yes	266(72.9%)
	2	18(5.0%)		No	98(26.9%)
	3	95(26.3%)	Cohabitation with the elderly	experience	183(50.3%)
	4	59(16.2%)		non	45(12.4%)
	graduate	153(41.9%)		live-in	136(37.4%)

3.2 Needs for gero-counseling

3.2.1 Degree of interest in gero-counseling

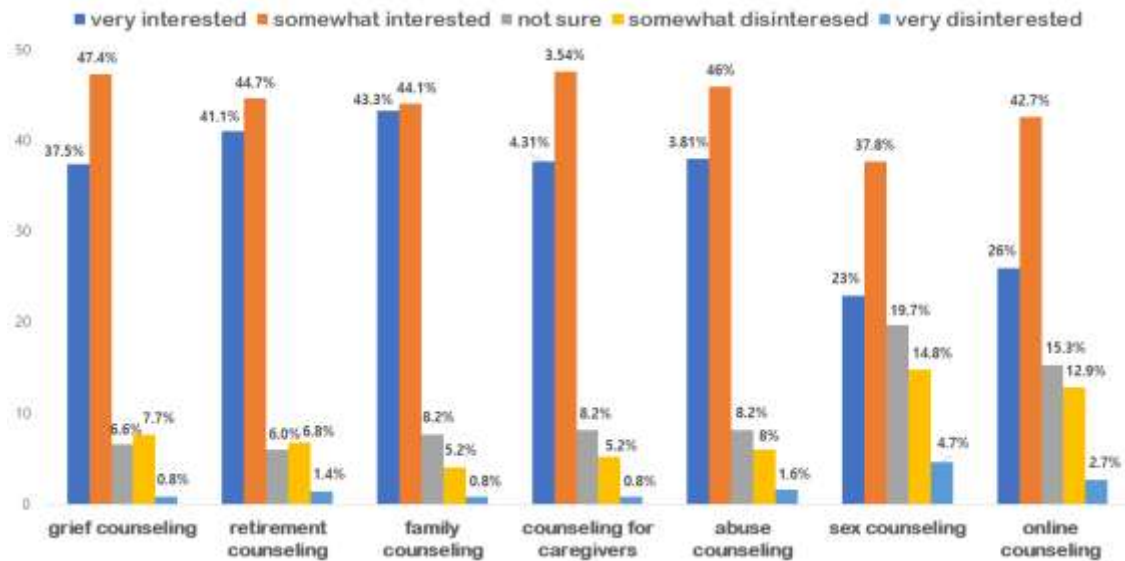
Students' interest in gero-counseling is shown in [Figure 1]. 143 people (39.1%) had very interested, 180 people (49.3%) had somewhat interested, 12 people (3.3%) had not sure, 21 people (5.8%) had somewhat disinterested, and 9 people (2.5%) had very disinterested.



[Fig. 1] Interest about gero-counseling

**3.2.2 Interest in subject areas related to gerocounseling**

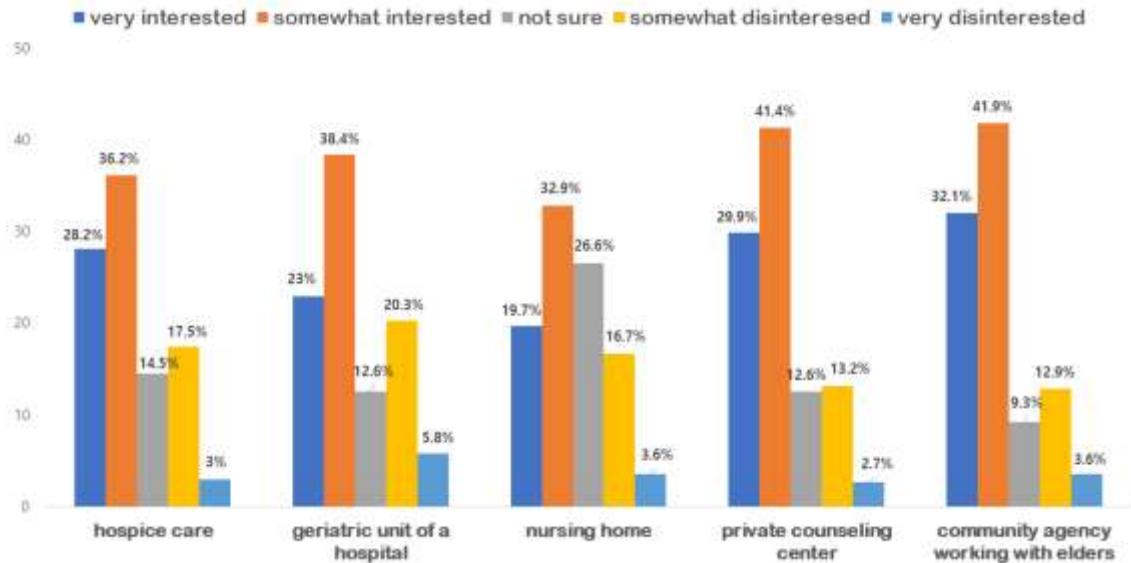
The degree of interest in the subject areas related to gerocounseling of cyber university students is shown in [Figure 2]. As a result of examining the degree of interest by the subject of gerocounseling, 137 people (37.5%) were very interested in grief counseling, and 174 people (47.4%) were somewhat interested. In the case of retirement counseling, 150 people (41.1%) were very interested and 164 people (44.7%) were somewhat interested. As a result of examining the degree of interest in family counseling with aging parents and older children, 158 people (43.3%) were very interested and 161 people (44.1%) were somewhat interested. In the case of counseling caregivers of the aged, 138 people (37.9%) were very interested and 174 people (47.8%) were somewhat interested. In the case of elder abuse counseling, 139 people (38.1%) were very interested and 168 people (46%) were somewhat interested. In the case of elderly sex counseling, 84 people (23%) were very interested, 138 people (37.8%) were somewhat interested, and the degree of interest in online gerocounseling was very interested 95 people (26.1%) and somewhat interested 156 people (42.9%).



[Fig. 2] Interest by topic for gerocounseling

**3.2.3 Interest in organizations related to gerocounseling**

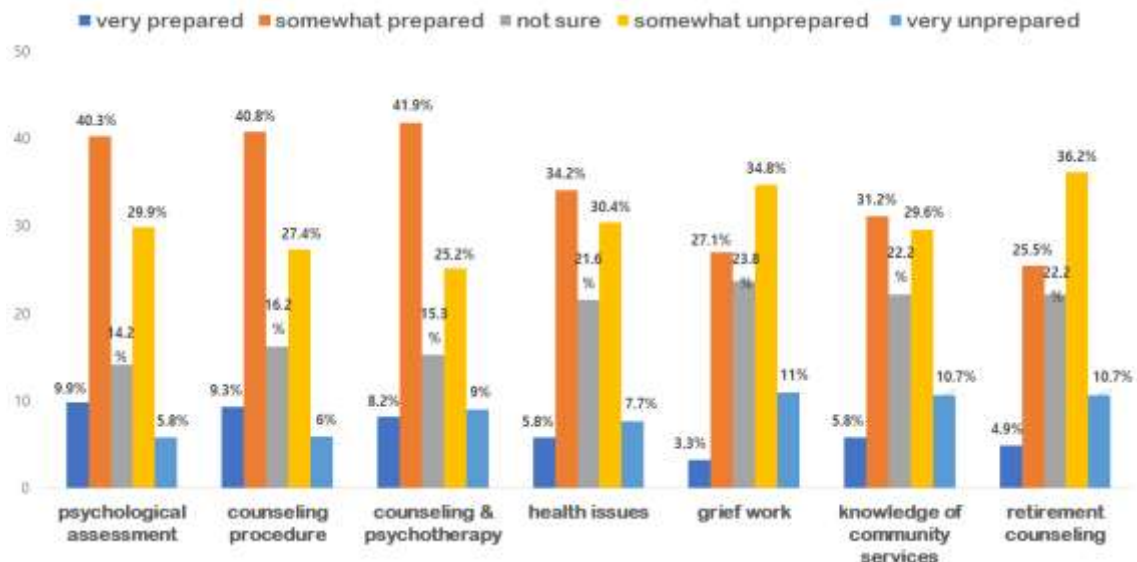
The degree of interest in the gerocounseling institution is shown in [Figure 3]. Hospice care was very interested in 103 people (28.4%), somewhat interested in 132 people (36.2%), and somewhat disinterested in 64 people (17.5%). In terms of interest in the geriatric unit of a hospital, 84 people (23%) were very interested, 140 people (38.4%) somewhat interested, and 74 people (20.3%) were somewhat disinterested. Regarding nursing home, 72 people (19.7%) were very interested, 120 people (32.9%) were somewhat interested, and 61 people (16.7%) were somewhat disinterested. The private counseling center specializing in the elderly was very interested in 109 people (29.9%), somewhat interested in 151 people (41.4%), and somewhat disinterested in 48 people (13.2%). And very interested 117 people (32.1%), somewhat interested 153 (41.9%), and somewhat disinterested 47 (12.9%) were in community agency for the aged.



[Fig. 3] Interest of gerocounseling institutions

**3.2.4 Level of preparedness for gerocounseling**

The level of preparedness for gerocounseling is as shown in [Figure 4]. As a result of examining the distribution of very prepared, somewhat prepared, and somewhat unprepared with the most responses, psychological assessment was very prepared 36 people (9.9%), somewhat prepared 147 people (40.3%), somewhat unprepared 109 People (29.9%). The preparedness for the counseling procedure, 34 people (9.3%) were very prepared, 149 people (40.8%) were somewhat prepared, and 100 (27.4%) were somewhat unprepared, and the preparedness for counseling and psychotherapy was very prepared 30 (8.2%), somewhat prepared 153 (42%), and somewhat unprepared 92 (25.3%). In health issues related to aging, were very prepared 21 people (5.8%) were very prepared, 125 (34.2%) somewhat prepared, and 111 (30.4%) somewhat unprepared. And 12 people (3.3%) were very prepared, 99 (27.1%) somewhat prepared and 127 (34.8%) somewhat unprepared in grief work. In addition, the knowledge of community service centers was very prepared 21 people (5.8%), somewhat prepared 114 (31.4%), somewhat unprepared 108 (29.8%), and the retirement counseling were 18 (4.9%) very prepared, 93 (25.5%) somewhat prepared, and 132 (36.2%) somewhat unprepared.

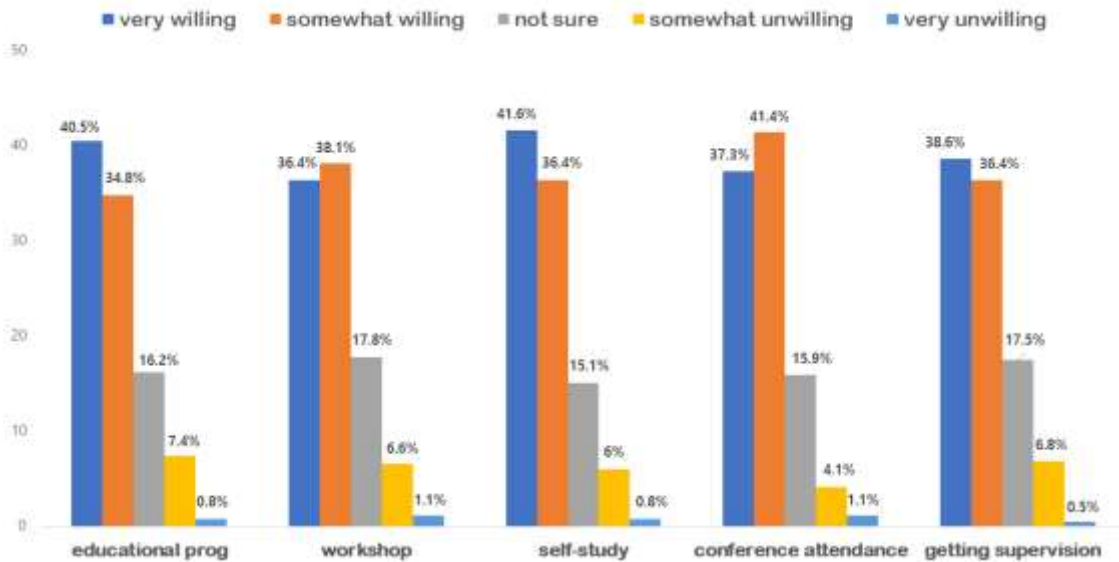


[Fig. 4] Preparation for gerocounseling

**3.2.5 Willingness to participate in specialized courses for gerocounseling**

[Figure 5] shows the results of the degree of willingness to participate in specialized courses for gerocounseling. The ratio of responses to very willing, somewhat willing, and somewhat unwilling with the most responses is as follows. Participation in educational programs was 148 people (40.5%) very willing, 127 people (34.8%) somewhat willing, and 27 people (7.4%) somewhat unwilling. As a result of confirming the

interest in participating in the workshop, 133 people (36.4%) were very willing, 139 people (38.1%) were somewhat willing, and 24 people (6.6%) were somewhat unwilling. In the case of self-study, 152 people (41.6%) were very willing, 133 people (36.4%) were somewhat willing, 22 people (6%) were somewhat unwilling, and 136 people (37.3%) very willing, somewhat willing 151 People (41.4%) and somewhat unwilling 15 (4.1%) in conference attendance. In the willingness of getting supervision, 141 people (38.6%) were very willing, 133 people (36.4%) were somewhat willing, and 25 people (6.8%) were somewhat unwilling.



[Fig. 5] Willingness to participate in specialized courses for gerocounseling

### 3.3 Differences in needs for gerocounseling

A  $\chi^2$  test was performed to examine whether there is a difference according to demographic characteristics between students who responded with interest in gerocounseling and those who responded with no interest. As a result of the analysis, there was no significant difference according to gender between students who were interested in gerocounseling and those who did not ( $\chi^2=.746, p>.05$ ). In addition, there was no difference according to age between students who were interested in counseling for the elderly and those who did not ( $\chi^2=1.699, p>.05$ ). As a result of examining whether the experience of cohabitant with the elderly caused a difference in the elderly counseling needs, there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups ( $\chi^2=1.276, p>.05$ ).

## IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was to investigate and analyze the needs for counseling for the elderly targeting cyber university students in Korea, and to find out whether there is a difference in the needs for gerocounseling according to gender, age, and living with the elderly. The purpose of this study was to help students explore career paths in the field of counseling for the elderly, and to provide basic data necessary for the development of quality education programs to foster counseling experts for the elderly. To achieve the purpose of the study, data from 365 cyber university undergraduate and graduate students who answered the online questionnaire were analyzed.

As a result of analyzing the needs for counseling for the elderly, 88.4% of cyber university students were found to be interested in gerocounseling. Regarding the subject area of gerocounseling, 84.1% showed positive interest in the general counseling for the elderly. According to the subject, positive interest in grief counseling, retirement counseling, family counseling, counseling caregivers of elders, and elder abuse counseling were all high at around 85%, and sex counseling and online counseling also showed interest in more than 60%. In addition, 50%-74% of students were interested in hospice care, geriatric unit of hospital, nursing home, private counseling center, and community agency for elders that they want to work in the future. It was also found that students themselves felt poorly prepared for gerocounseling. Regarding gerocounseling, the students answered that psychological assessment and counseling procedures were prepared at around 50%, and that aging-related health issues, grief work, knowledge of community services, and retirement counseling were prepared at around 30%. As for the curriculum they would like to participate in for counseling for the elderly, more than 75% of them said that they would participate in educational program courses, workshops, self-study, conference attendance, and getting supervision. Existing researchers have suggested overall interest, readiness and willingness to train for the elders as predictors of their decision to become senior counseling experts [22]. The results of this study show that students at cyber universities own predictors who can become gerocounseling

experts, showing a positive outlook for gerocounseling among students at cyber universities. A prior study said that only 59% of the graduate students expressed their willingness for gerocounseling [6], but the results of this study show that undergraduate and graduate students of cyber university have higher willingness for counseling for the elderly.

On the other hand, we investigated whether demographic characteristics such as gender, age and cohabitation experience with the elderly showed differences in the desire for gerocounseling, and found no statistically significant results. This is a different result from studies that show that age, gender, and cohabitation experience with the elderly affect their willingness to consult [6]. In this study, there was no difference in the need for counseling with the elderly according to age, but it is said that the elderly tend to prefer older counselors [11]. This suggests that if cyber university students' high interest in counseling for the elderly and the characteristics of a relatively high average age can expand the scope of opportunities to work as counselors for senior citizens in the future.

To summarize the results, a significant number of undergraduate and graduate students in counseling psychology at cyber university are interested in gerocounseling. At the same time, most students agree that training and curriculum are needed due to lack of preparation to work in the field of counseling for senior citizens, and 70-80% of students say they are aware of the lack of preparation. This is a result showing the need for education and training programs in the field of gerocounseling.

Based on the results and discussions of this study, the limitations of the study are clarified and suggestions for subsequent studies are as follows. First, this study examined the needs of gerocounseling only for undergraduate and graduate students of a specific cyber university in Korea. It is difficult to generalize because the research was conducted only on specific cyber university students located in Seoul, Korea. Second, in addition to demographic factors, environmental and psychological factors can act as variables affecting the gerocounseling needs. In this study, cognitive factors such as negative attitudes toward the elderly and emotional factors such as discomfort toward aging were not examined. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the effects of psychology major students on the intention of counseling for the elderly in a multidimensional manner. Third, considering the fact that the elderly are also classified into the young-old, middle-old, and old-old, etc. according to the time, it is necessary to examine the needs of counseling according to the age of the target when counseling with the elderly. Finally, the elderly may experience a variety of psychological problems, including depression, insomnia and anxiety. In this study, only specific topics such as retirement counseling, grief counseling, and sexual counseling were examined. In future research, it is necessary to diversify and examine the subject areas of counseling for the elderly.

Despite these limitations, the implication of this study is as follows. In recent decades, social interest in psychological counseling has been increasing, and in particular, the field of counseling for children and adolescents is attracting active research and empirical interest. On the other hand, interest in gerocounseling is still insignificant. In the social welfare field, in line with the aging trend, interest in counseling for the elderly is increasing, mainly within welfare centers for elderly. However, within the field of psychology, the counseling for the elderly is very lacking in academic and empirical interest. In this respect, the results of this study can be used as basic data for the development of curriculum in the field of gerocounseling in the future and for cyber students to explore career paths in the field of counseling for the elderly. Through this study, students' high intention and needs of counseling for the elderly were confirmed, and these results show that psychological interest and support in the field of gerocounseling are needed to keep pace with the aging trend.

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