

FACTORS INFLUENCING SUBJECTIVE QUALITY OF LIFE IN RURAL AREAS IN SOUTH KOREA: FOCUS ON EUP AND MYEON REGIONS

Junggoog Go* and Minu Lee

National Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Rural Development Administration, Wanju-55365, Republic of Korea

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors influencing subjective quality of life (SQOL) among rural residents in South Korea, with a focus on eup and myeon regions. Data were derived from a 2022 national survey on rural well-being and analyzed using correlation analysis, t-tests, and multiple regression. The findings revealed that SQOL was higher in eup regions, primarily influenced by strong neighbor relationships, a critical determinant across both regions. Key factors affecting SQOL included demographic attributes such as gender, age, marital status, education, and household characteristics. Notably, agricultural engagement emerged as a significant contributor to SQOL in myeon areas, highlighting the vital role of agriculture in rural livelihoods. Policy recommendations include enhancing healthcare services in eup regions and promoting agricultural productivity, infrastructure, and community development in myeon regions to reduce disparities. These insights highlight the need for region-specific strategies to improve rural well-being and foster sustainable agricultural and socio-economic development.

Keywords: Rural areas, Subjective quality of life, Eup and myeon regions, Life satisfaction

Similar to many other developed nations, rural areas in South Korea face a range of interconnected challenges, including population decline, demographic aging, and economic stagnation, with significant implications for agricultural communities. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Statistics Korea (2023), rural populations account for only 18.5% of the total population, while the proportion of elderly individuals aged 65 and above reaches 24.3%, a figure substantially higher than the urban counterpart of 16.2%. These demographic shifts are particularly concerning for agriculture-dependent regions, where aging populations and labor shortages have led to decreased agricultural productivity, diminished rural vitality, and challenges to sustaining local agricultural enterprises. In recent decades, rapid urbanization and industrialization have exacerbated these issues, leading to a growing disparity between urban and rural areas in terms of economic opportunities, infrastructure development, and social services. As agricultural practices become increasingly mechanized and automated, the rural workforce faces growing difficulties in maintaining the labor-intensive nature of traditional farming, which has long been the backbone of South Korea's rural economy. Furthermore, agricultural communities are confronted with the dual challenge of balancing economic pressures with environmental sustainability, particularly in the context of climate change and land use changes.

In response to these multifaceted challenges, understanding and improving the quality of life in rural

agricultural areas has become a pressing concern. Quality of life is a multidimensional concept that encompasses not only economic factors such as income and employment but also broader aspects of well-being, including access to education, healthcare, and social services (Felce and Perry, 1995; Stiglitz *et al.*, 2009). The World Health Organization defines quality of life as "an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live, and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns" (World Health Organization Quality of Life Group, 1995). In rural agricultural areas, this definition is particularly relevant, as quality of life extends beyond the economic aspects of farming and incorporates issues such as social cohesion, community engagement, and environmental sustainability.

This holistic view of rural well-being has garnered increasing attention in both academic research and policy-making, particularly within the context of rural development and agricultural sustainability. International organizations, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020), have highlighted the importance of quality of life in shaping rural development policies across member countries, highlighting the need for integrated approaches that address both the economic and social dimensions of agricultural communities. As global attention to rural development intensifies, the examination of quality of life in agricultural contexts remains critical to shaping policies that not only support agricultural productivity but also enhance the social and environmental sustainability of rural areas.

*Corresponding author: jay1001@korea.kr, junggooggo@gmail.com
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The importance of investigating quality of life in rural areas cannot be overstated, particularly in the context of agricultural sustainability and rural development. Rural communities are integral to food production, environmental conservation, and the preservation of cultural heritage (van der Ploeg *et al.*, 2000). They also serve as custodians of vast agricultural landscapes, which contribute to biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and sustainable resource management. However, the persistent urban-rural divide in terms of economic opportunities, access to services, and overall living conditions continues to pose significant challenges to the long-term viability of rural areas. This divide not only hampers the economic resilience of agricultural communities but also exacerbates issues such as depopulation, labor shortages in farming, and limited access to healthcare and education (Li *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, understanding the factors that contribute to quality of life in rural areas is critical for the design of policies and interventions aimed at promoting rural sustainability.

In South Korea, rural areas are administratively categorized into two main divisions: “eup” and “myeon.” Eup areas represent larger settlements that function as local administrative hubs, typically housing populations between 20,000 and 50,000. These regions tend to exhibit more advanced infrastructure and a diverse economic base, encompassing both agricultural and non-agricultural activities. In contrast, myeon areas are smaller rural districts, generally home to populations under 20,000. These areas are predominantly agricultural, with more traditional rural lifestyles and comparatively less developed infrastructure. Understanding this administrative distinction is essential for analyzing the disparities in quality of life and the unique development challenges faced by rural communities across South Korea.

The distinction between eup and myeon regions holds particular significance in the context of South Korea, particularly regarding agricultural activities and rural development. Eup areas, typically characterized by higher population densities and proximity to urban centers, often function as local administrative and commercial hubs, offering a broader range of economic activities. In contrast, myeon areas are generally more remote and less developed, with a stronger reliance on traditional agricultural practices and rural lifestyles. These disparities can have a profound impact on residents’ access to services, economic opportunities, and participation in agricultural activities, thereby contributing to significant variations in quality of life (Im and Park, 2023).

Given these regional distinctions, it is crucial to examine the factors influencing rural quality of life while

accounting for the unique characteristics of eup and myeon areas. Previous research has identified a variety of determinants of rural well-being, including individual characteristics, household factors, and community dynamics. For example, Shucksmith *et al.* (2009) demonstrated that age, education, and employment status are significant predictors of life satisfaction in rural areas across Europe. In the Asian context, Li *et al.* (2015) emphasized the critical role of social capital and community cohesion in shaping the well-being of rural residents in China. However, many of these studies tend to treat rural areas as homogeneous, often overlooking the potential variations between different types of rural communities (Andrews and Withey, 1976). International studies have also highlighted the importance of environmental factors in determining rural quality of life. Agarwal *et al.* (2024) found that access to nature and environmental quality were key contributors to life satisfaction in rural areas of the United Kingdom. Similarly, a study by Wilson *et al.* (2020) in Australia highlighted the significance of climate resilience in sustaining rural quality of life, particularly in light of growing environmental challenges.

In South Korea, research examining the nuances of quality of life between eup and myeon regions is limited. Ko and Jung (2021) identified differences in life satisfaction between residents of these areas, attributing these disparities to variations in access to healthcare and cultural amenities. However, their study was confined to a single province and did not provide a comprehensive analysis of the broader range of factors that could influence quality of life across rural regions. Given the unique challenges faced by rural areas in South Korea, as well as the potential disparities between eup and myeon regions, there is a critical need for a more nuanced understanding of rural quality of life. The present study seeks to address this gap in the literature by examining the subjective quality of life of rural residents, with a particular focus on the comparative analysis of eup and myeon regions.

Agricultural policies have a direct and significant impact on the quality of life for rural residents. Recent research indicates that policies such as agricultural subsidies, rural development programs, and support for agricultural technologies contribute to increased farm income and the improvement of rural infrastructure, thereby enhancing overall quality of life (Kim *et al.*, 2020). Specifically, Lee and Park (2022) found that targeted smart policies for farm support positively influence farmers’ quality of life by boosting agricultural productivity and reducing labor intensity.

The specific research questions guiding this study are as follows: (a) Is there a difference in the subjective quality of life (happiness) between residents of eup and

myeon regions? (b) How do individual characteristics, household factors, and satisfaction with various life domains influence the subjective quality of life (happiness) of residents in eup and myeon regions?

This study not only contributes to the understanding of rural quality of life in South Korea but also adds to the broader global discourse on rural development. By examining the distinct administrative structure of eup and myeon regions, it offers insights into the varying levels of well-being experienced by different types of rural settlements within a country. This approach aligns with recent international research trends that emphasize the need for a more nuanced understanding of rural diversity (e.g., Canada: Irwin *et al.*, 2023; Spain: Alfaro-Navarro, 2024). These international perspectives highlight the global relevance of examining intra-rural differences in quality of life studies.

By addressing these questions, the current study makes a significant contribution to the expanding body of literature on rural well-being and provides empirical evidence to inform policy decisions aimed at improving the quality of life in diverse rural settings. The findings have the potential to guide the development of targeted interventions that address the specific needs and challenges of different rural communities, ultimately fostering more sustainable and equitable rural development in South Korea. Furthermore, the insights derived from this research can offer valuable lessons for other countries facing similar rural development challenges, promoting a more comprehensive and nuanced approach to enhancing rural quality of life on a global scale.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Data source

This study utilized data from the 2022 Survey on Rural Well-being, an annual survey conducted by the Rural Development Administration's National Institute of Agricultural Sciences in South Korea. This nationally representative survey is designed to assess the quality of life and well-being of rural residents throughout the country, providing a comprehensive snapshot of the diverse factors influencing rural life in South Korea.

Sampling method

A stratified random sampling method was employed to ensure adequate representation of both eup and myeon areas, the two primary types of rural administrative divisions in South Korea. The sampling process followed a two-stage cluster sampling approach:

First stage: Administrative districts (eup and myeon) were randomly selected from all rural areas

in South Korea. The number of selected districts was proportionally distributed based on the population size of eup and myeon areas.

Second stage: Within each selected district, households were randomly chosen for participation in the survey.

This sampling method was chosen to ensure a representative sample that accurately reflects the population distribution and characteristics of rural South Korea. It allows for meaningful comparisons between eup and myeon areas while minimizing sampling bias.

Sample size and characteristics

The final sample consisted of 4,000 households in rural South Korea, with respondents aged 19 years and above. This sample size was determined to be sufficient for conducting robust statistical analyses and drawing reliable conclusions about the rural population.

Data collection

The survey gathered information on various aspects of rural life, including demographic characteristics, household factors, and satisfaction with different life domains. Respondents were asked to rate their overall life satisfaction and happiness on a five-point Likert scale.

Subjective quality of life was assessed using a single item focused on current life happiness: *"How happy do you feel right now?"* Responses were rated on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater levels of happiness.

Satisfaction with various life domains was measured by asking respondents, *"How satisfied are you with the following aspects of life in your current area of residence?"* Each life domain was rated on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores reflecting higher levels of satisfaction.

Ethical considerations

This study utilized data from the 2022 Survey on Rural Well-being, an annual survey conducted by the Rural Development Administration of the National Institute of Agricultural Sciences. The survey is recognized as nationally approved statistics (Approval Number: 114037) and is part of the official national statistics collection. As an officially approved survey, it has undergone rigorous ethical review processes, meaning that separate approval from an institutional review board (IRB) was not required.

The survey adheres to the ethical standards set by national statistical agencies, ensuring participant confidentiality and voluntary participation. Data were anonymized prior to analysis, and no personally

identifiable information was used in this study. The research team strictly adhered to the relevant ethical guidelines throughout the processes of data access, handling, and analysis, ensuring the integrity and ethical conduct of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics

The study population consists of 4,000 residents from rural eup and myeon areas in South Korea. The data is categorized according to various demographic and socioeconomic variables, including gender, age, marital status, education level, farm household status, family type, housing type, and monthly living expenses.

Gender distribution shows a slightly higher proportion of women in both areas. Eup areas have a larger proportion of residents under 40 years of age, while myeon areas feature higher percentages of individuals aged 50–60 and over 70 years. Married

individuals are more prevalent in eup areas.

Educational attainment is generally higher in eup areas, with a greater proportion of high school and college graduates, while myeon areas have a higher percentage of residents with only a middle school education or less. Farm households are more common in myeon areas.

Single-person and single-generation families are more frequent in myeon areas, whereas two-generation families are more common in eup areas.

Housing types show notable differences: detached houses are predominant in myeon areas (76.1%), compared to eup areas (31.0%), while apartments are more common in eup areas (51.3%) than in myeon areas (18.1%).

Monthly living expenses are generally similar across both areas, with the majority of households spending between 1 and 3 million KRW per month. However, myeon areas have a higher percentage of households

Table 1. General characteristics of the study population

(N=4,000)

		Eup		Myeon	
		Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	752	39.2	909	43.6
	Female	1,165	60.8	1,174	56.4
Age	Less than 40 years	863	45.0	524	25.1
	50-60 year	765	39.9	923	44.3
	70 years and above	289	15.1	637	30.6
Marital status	With Spouse	1,220	63.7	1,138	54.6
	Without Spouse	696	36.3	945	45.5
Education	Middle school or less	516	26.9	1025	49.2
	High School	809	42.2	722	34.6
	College or above	59.2	30.9	337	16.2
Farm household	Farm household	356	18.6	899	43.2
	Non-Farm household	1,561	81.4	1,184	56.8
Family type	Single-person Household	522	27.2	710	34.1
	Single-Generation Family	462	24.1	608	29.1
	Family with Two Generation	932	48.6	765	36.7
Type of housing	Detached house	594	31.0	1,586	76.1
	Apartment	983	51.3	378	18.1
	Multi-family house /other	340	17.7	120	5.8
Monthly Living Expenses	Less than 1 million KRW (approximately 1,000 USD)	278	14.5	587	28.5
	1-3 million KRW (approximately 1,000-3,000 USD)	980	51.2	1,130	54.8
	More Than 3 million KRW (approximately 3,000 USD)	657	34.3	345	16.7

Table 2. Correlation analysis of personal characteristics, household characteristics, satisfaction with life domains, and subjective quality of life

(N=4,000)

Personal Characteristics			Household Characteristics							Satisfaction with Life Domains										Subjective QoL®
①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	⑩	⑪	⑫	⑬	⑭	⑮	⑯	⑰	⑱	⑲	⑳	㉑
②	0.11**	1																		
③	0.23**	0.34**	1																	
④	-0.18**	-0.75**	-0.44**	1																
⑤	0.22**	0.33**	0.32**	-0.24**	1															
⑥	-0.10**	-0.34**	-0.51**	0.39**	-0.25**	1														
⑦	0.00	-0.54**	-0.09**	0.43**	0.12**	0.05**	1													
⑧	-0.13**	-0.52**	-0.52**	0.59**	-0.23**	0.58**	0.26**	1												
⑨	0.01	0.01	-0.02	0.04*	0.07**	0.01	0.06**	0.01	1											
⑩	0.04**	0.04*	0.02	0.01	0.03	0.05**	0.04**	0.01	0.63**	1										
⑪	0.04**	0.09**	0.08**	-0.02	0.08**	0.02	0.02	-0.09**	0.48**	0.48**	1									
⑫	0.04**	0.17**	0.08**	-0.11**	0.12**	-0.01	-0.07**	-0.11**	0.43**	0.42**	0.51**	1								
⑬	0.03	0.07**	0.01	-0.05**	0.07**	0.00	0.01	-0.03*	0.53**	0.45**	0.40**	0.44**	1							
⑭	0.01	0.21**	0.05**	-0.17**	0.02	-0.02	-0.21**	-0.08**	0.21**	0.25**	0.20**	0.14**	0.32**	1						
⑮	0.05**	0.24**	0.06**	-0.18**	-0.05**	-0.01	-0.32**	-0.10**	0.12**	0.19**	0.12**	0.11**	0.20**	0.56**	1					
⑯	0.07**	0.27**	0.06**	-0.24**	-0.07**	-0.01	-0.31**	-0.13**	0.11**	0.16**	0.14**	0.11**	0.23**	0.44**	0.58**	1				
⑰	0.03*	0.09**	-0.02	-0.07**	-0.03	0.00	-0.05**	0.01	0.21**	0.32**	0.21**	0.24**	0.28**	0.28**	0.31**	0.31**	1			
⑱	-0.02	-0.17**	-0.08**	0.20**	-0.05**	0.11**	0.16**	0.15**	0.17**	0.17**	0.18**	0.12**	0.11**	0.20**	0.16**	0.14**	0.19**	1		
㉑	-0.03	0.23**	0.28**	-0.24**	0.19**	-0.20**	-0.05**	-0.27**	-0.10**	-0.10**	-0.03	0.00	-0.09**	-0.05**	-0.08**	-0.17**	-0.15**	-0.10**	1	

1. Personal Characteristics: ① Gender ② Age ③ Marital Status ④ Education

2. Household Characteristics : ⑤ Farm Household ⑥ Family Type ⑦ Type of Housing ⑧ Monthly Living Expenses

3. Satisfaction with Life Domains: ⑨ Health and Medical Care ⑩ Welfare Service ⑪ Education Condition ⑫ Cultural Leisure Condition ⑬ Living Infrastructure ⑭ Safety ⑮ Environment Landscape ⑯ Relationship with Neighbours ⑰ Economic Condition ⑱ Informatisation Condition ⑲ Subjective Quality of Life

spending less than 1 million KRW.

These demographic and socioeconomic characteristics provide valuable context for understanding variations in quality of life and satisfaction levels between eup and myeon areas in rural South Korea.

Correlation analysis

Correlation analysis exhibited significant relationships between the majority of variables and subjective quality of life. The correlation analysis in Table 2 reveals several key factors influencing subjective quality of life (QoL) among rural residents. Personal characteristics such as age and marital status are positively correlated with QoL, while education shows a negative correlation. Household characteristics, including farm household status, are positively associated with higher QoL, whereas larger family types tend to have a negative impact. Satisfaction with life domains, particularly health, welfare services, and living infrastructure, exhibits strong positive correlations with QoL, highlighting the importance of these areas in shaping residents' overall life satisfaction.

Results of the t-test

T-test results indicated that residents in eup areas (M = 3.44) reported significantly higher levels of subjective quality of life compared to those in myeon areas (M = 3.30, $t = 5.61$, $p < 0.01$). These findings suggest that residents in eup areas experience a higher subjective quality of life than their counterparts in myeon areas. This difference may be attributed to variations in infrastructure, economic opportunities, and access to services between the two types of regions. These results highlight the need for policy interventions that address these disparities and promote equitable development across rural areas in South Korea.

Table 3. t-test results comparing quality of life scores between Eup and Myeon regions

	M	SD	t
Eup	3.44	0.74	5.61***
Myeon	3.30	0.78	

*** Significant at $p < 0.01$

Multiple regression analysis

Multiple regression analysis revealed that individual characteristics, including gender, age, marital status, and education level, significantly influenced subjective quality of life in both eup and myeon regions, consistent with established research on quality of life (Diener *et al.*, 2018). In eup regions, housing type ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.01$) and satisfaction with welfare services ($\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.001$) were significant factors affecting quality of life.

In contrast, myeon regions were influenced by farming status ($\beta = -0.06$, $p < 0.01$) and monthly living expenses ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.001$) as significant predictors. These regional differences highlight the need for tailored policy interventions in each area.

Both eup and myeon regions exhibited significant effects of individual characteristics on subjective quality of life. Gender was associated with higher life satisfaction in both regions, with men reporting higher satisfaction in eup ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < 0.001$) and myeon ($\beta = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$) areas. This finding is consistent with Bock (2015) observations on persistent gender inequalities in rural settings. Age showed a negative relationship with life satisfaction in both regions (eup: $\beta = -0.12$, $p < 0.001$; myeon: $\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.001$), which, while contrary to some Western studies (Blanchflower and Oswald, 2008), aligns with findings from other Asian rural contexts (Li *et al.*, 2015), suggesting that older rural residents in South Korea face unique challenges.

Education level positively influenced life satisfaction in both regions (eup: $\beta = 0.11$, $p < 0.01$; myeon: $\beta = 0.06$, $p < 0.05$), supporting Shucksmith *et al.* (2009) conclusions on the importance of human capital in rural well-being. Among household characteristics, housing type showed significant but divergent effects in eup ($\beta = 0.09$, $p < 0.01$) and myeon ($\beta = -0.05$, $p < 0.05$) regions. This difference may be explained by contrasting housing preferences and availability in more urbanized (eup) and traditional rural (myeon) areas, as suggested by Scott *et al.* (2020).

Satisfaction with neighbor relationships emerged as the strongest predictor of life quality in both regions (eup: $\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$; myeon: $\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$), emphasizing the critical role of social capital in rural well-being, in line with Sørensen (2016) findings in European rural areas. Farming status was significant only in myeon regions ($\beta = -0.06$, $p < 0.01$), highlighting the continued relevance of agriculture in traditional rural settings, supporting Marsden (2016) observations about the varying roles of agriculture across different types of rural spaces.

These results demonstrate both universal and region-specific factors influencing rural quality of life, suggesting the need for nuanced and context-sensitive policy approaches in rural development.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

Our findings highlight the intricate interplay of individual, community, and regional factors in shaping the quality of life in rural South Korea. Based on these insights, we propose a comprehensive, multi-layered approach to policy recommendations that caters to the distinct needs of eup and myeon regions, while acknowledging their common challenges.

Table 4. Multiple regression analysis of factors influencing quality of life in eup and myeon regions

(N=4,000)

		Eup	Meyon
		B (β)	B (β)
Personal characteristics	Gender	0.15 (0.10***)	0.12 (0.08***)
	Age	0-.01 (-0.12***)	-0.01 (-0.16***)
	Marital status	-0.10 (-0.11***)	-0.15 (-0.18***)
	Education	0.07 (0.11**)	0.04 (0.06*)
Household characteristics	Farm household	0.02 (0.04)	-0.09 (-0.06**)
	Family type	0.03 (-0.04)	-0.01 (-0.01)
	Type of housing	-0.05 (0.09**)	-0.08 (-0.05*)
	Monthly living expenses	0.05 (0.01)	0.09 (0.14***)
Satisfaction with life domains	Health and medical care	0.00 (0.10**)	0.00 (0.02)
	Welfare service	0.00 (0.11***)	0.00 (0.02)
	Education condition	0.00 (-0.03)	0.00 (0.04)
	Cultural-leisure condition	0.00 (-0.04)	0.00 (-0.01)
	Living infrastructure	0.00 (0.06*)	0.00 (0.04)
	Safety	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (-0.08**)
	Environment-landscape	0.00 (-0.09**)	0.00 (0.07*)
	Neighbours relationships	0.01 (0.21***)	0.01 (0.26***)
	Economic condition	0.00 (0.03)	0.00 (0.08***)
	Informatisation condition	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.02)
R ²		0.20	0.25
Adjusted-R ²		0.20	0.24
F		27.16***	37.03***

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

Community-Centric Development

- Community Farming:** Establish communal agricultural zones to foster community cohesion and enhance quality of life through collaborative farming activities.
- Rural Cultural Centers:** Develop cultural centers in each village to provide spaces for recreational activities, lifelong learning, and intergenerational exchange.
- Social Capital Enhancement:** Promote initiatives that strengthen neighborly relationships, which have a profound influence on subjective well-being in both eup and myeon regions.

Health and Well-being

- Rural Health Promotion:** Design health management programs integrated with agricultural activities to improve both physical and mental well-being, thereby alleviating the physical strain associated with farming.

- Healthcare Access:** Bridge healthcare disparities by establishing mobile clinics, telemedicine services, and offering incentives to healthcare professionals to work in rural areas, with particular attention to the aging population.

Economic Revitalization

- Targeted Agricultural Support:** In myeon areas, where agriculture plays a pivotal role in quality of life, focus on improving agricultural productivity and income stability through tailored subsidies, technical support, and enhanced market access.
- Economic Diversification:** In eup areas, prioritize the attraction of diverse businesses and the promotion of entrepreneurship. In myeon areas, support the development of agri-tourism and rural creative economies as alternative income sources.

Infrastructure and Environment

- Infrastructure Development:** While both regions require continued investment, prioritize

improvements to basic infrastructure and connectivity in myeon regions. In eup areas, focus on enhancing the efficiency and quality of existing infrastructure.

- b) *Environmental Conservation*: Implement policies aimed at preserving rural landscapes and ecosystems, which contribute significantly to residents' life satisfaction. These policies should include sustainable farming practices, reforestation initiatives, and eco-friendly rural development programs.

Governance and Policy Implementation

- a) *Participatory Planning*: Engage local communities in the decision-making process to ensure policies align with local needs and preferences, recognizing the importance of community bonds in rural areas.
- b) *Tailored Approaches*: Develop region-specific strategies for eup and myeon areas that account for their unique characteristics and needs.

Feasibility and Implementation Considerations

The implementation of these policies necessitates a nuanced approach that takes into account the diverse capacities and resources of different rural areas:

Funding Mechanisms: A multi-faceted funding strategy should be employed, combining national and local government budgets with public-private partnerships. This diversified financial model will help sustain long-term initiatives and alleviate potential financial constraints.

Phased Implementation: Initially, prioritize high-impact, low-resource interventions that can be quickly enacted, while simultaneously building the capacity for more complex, long-term projects. For example, community engagement initiatives could be implemented swiftly, whereas infrastructure development may require additional time and resources for execution.

Capacity Building: Invest in enhancing local government capabilities and community leadership to ensure the successful and sustainable implementation of policies. This is especially important given the varying levels of local implementation capacity.

Adaptive Management: Regularly evaluate and adjust policies in response to ongoing feedback and the evolving dynamics of rural communities. This adaptive approach is vital given the constantly changing challenges faced by rural areas.

Potential Challenges: Key challenges in policy execution include resistance to change from some community members, difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled professionals in rural regions, and the

necessity for long-term commitment to see meaningful results. These barriers can be mitigated through effective community engagement, targeted incentive programs, and clear communication regarding the long-term benefits of such initiatives.

Despite these challenges, the potential benefits in terms of enhanced quality of life and sustainable rural development justify the investment. Pilot programs in selected communities can serve as testing grounds to identify best practices and refine implementation strategies before a broader rollout.

These findings highlight the importance of considering individual, regional, and agricultural factors when designing policies aimed at improving quality of life in rural areas. It is evident that policies designed to enhance the quality of life of rural residents must be tailored to the specific needs and conditions of eup and myeon regions, with particular attention to agricultural development in myeon areas.

The study revealed that satisfaction with neighbor relationships had the strongest influence on subjective quality of life in both eup and myeon regions. This emphasizes the centrality of community bonds and social capital in rural areas. Policies that foster community cohesion and promote social interaction, particularly through agricultural cooperatives and community farming initiatives, could significantly enhance quality of life.

The differences in influential factors between eup and myeon regions suggest the need for differentiated policy approaches. For example, in eup areas, improving health and welfare services may be the priority, while in myeon areas, enhancing safety, economic opportunities, and agricultural support might be more critical.

This study offers empirical evidence on the factors influencing subjective quality of life in rural South Korea, highlighting regional differences between eup and myeon areas. The findings challenge the notion of a homogenous rural experience and stress the necessity for region-specific policies. These insights are globally relevant, as many countries face comparable challenges in rural development.

The consistent influence of individual characteristics such as gender, age, marital status, and educational level on subjective well-being in both regions highlights the universal importance of these factors. However, the varying degrees of their influence between eup and myeon areas suggest that the broader community context may moderate the impact of personal attributes. This interaction between individual and community-level factors warrants further exploration in future policy design.

The differing effects of agricultural participation and productivity in eup and myeon regions provide critical insights for targeted rural development interventions. In myeon regions, where agriculture is a dominant part of the local economy, policies aimed at improving agricultural income could have a substantial positive effect on quality of life. This finding highlights the need for tailored rural development strategies that account for the varying significance of agriculture in different types of rural communities.

From a global perspective, this study contributes to the broader discourse on rural development and well-being by emphasizing the complex relationships between agricultural activities, community characteristics, and subjective well-being. As countries worldwide address issues of rural-urban inequality and strive to promote sustainable rural development, understanding the factors that influence the subjective quality of life in rural communities becomes increasingly crucial.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study advances the understanding of rural quality of life in South Korea by emphasizing the importance of regional differences and agricultural factors within rural areas. As rural communities worldwide continue to face challenges related to demographic shifts and economic transformation, the targeted, nuanced approaches outlined in this study are crucial for ensuring the sustainability and vitality of diverse rural areas. The findings of this research resonate with global trends in rural development. For example, they align with recent studies conducted in the European Union (Grodzicki and Jankiewicz, 2022) and Japan (Tanaka *et al.*, 2023), which also identified significant variations in quality of life between more and less urbanized rural areas. However, the pronounced influence of agricultural factors on well-being in South Korea's myeon areas is particularly noteworthy, as it highlights the continued importance of farming in rural life in South Korea - an aspect that appears more pronounced compared to several Western countries.

The policy implications of this study extend beyond South Korea, as many nations face rural-urban disparities and the challenge of sustaining viable rural communities. The findings suggest that a nuanced approach, recognizing the diversity within rural areas, could be valuable in other national contexts. For instance, the emphasis on community engagement and social relationships as critical determinants of rural well-being could inform global rural development strategies.

Moreover, South Korea's experience in balancing agricultural productivity with quality of life concerns offers valuable lessons for other rapidly industrializing countries, particularly those in Asia. The need for

tailored policies that address the specific needs of diverse rural communities is likely a common theme in global rural development efforts.

While this study offers significant insights, it has certain limitations that future research should address. First, the cross-sectional nature of the data limits the ability to infer causal relationships. Longitudinal studies that track changes in rural quality of life over time would provide stronger evidence of causal mechanisms. Second, the study focused solely on subjective measures of quality of life. Future research could integrate objective indicators, such as income levels and health outcomes, to provide a more comprehensive picture of rural well-being.

Additionally, while the study examined differences between eup and myeon areas, significant variations may exist within these categories that were not captured in the current analysis. A more granular investigation of different types of rural communities could yield further insights. Future research could also include longitudinal studies to assess changes in rural quality of life over time, particularly in response to policy interventions. Comparative studies across countries could identify both universal and context-specific factors that influence rural well-being. Furthermore, in-depth qualitative research could provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of rural residents and the mechanisms through which various factors affect quality of life. Investigating the impact of digital technologies and smart farming practices on rural well-being, especially in the context of an aging agricultural workforce, would also be a valuable area for future research. Lastly, examining the role of climate change adaptation and environmental sustainability in shaping rural quality of life is an important avenue for further exploration.

Authors' contribution

Conceptualization and designing of research work (ML): Data collection, writing the initial and final version (JG): Analysis of data and interpretation (JG).

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