

More Grown-ups Stay in Parental Nest

Youths Find It Hard to Get Job Amid Economic Sluggishness

By Lee Hyo-sik, Staff Reporter *Korea Times*

Bae Sung-soo, 29, has failed to find a job for the past two years since he graduated from college even though he has submitted his resume to more than 100 companies.

Early last month, he gave up looking for jobs and instead, goes to a university library. He is there not to study, but to hang out with others in similar situations. "I do not think that I will ever be able to get a job no matter how hard I try. So, I have decided to take some time off and sit back for a while," Bae said. He can afford that lifestyle thanks to his parents who run their own successful business. "I am staying at my parents' house and still receive pocket money from them," Bae said with a grin. "I plan to start my own business some time next year as my parents agreed to help me financially. But first I want to travel overseas."

Like Bae, an increasing number of adults in their 20s and 30s in Korea continue to rely on their parents even after graduating from university. In South Korea, such adults are referred to as being members of the "Kangaroo tribe." The majority of them end up living with their parents because they are not able to find a job in a tight job market following the sluggish economy.

Domestic companies have become increasingly reluctant to hire new workers in an uncertain business climate, pushing the youth jobless rate to a record high. Korea's education system, designed to serve mostly university-bound students and parents' academic preferences for their children, also plays a large part in increasing the youth unemployment rate. College graduates' preference for office jobs intensifies the competition for limited job openings, while they shun physically demanding blue-collar jobs in the manufacturing sector. As a result, the number of the youths aged between 15 and 29 with jobs has continued to fall over the past few years. According to the National Statistical Office (NSO), the figure dropped 4.8 percent to 4.35 million in September from a year earlier, the biggest drop in more than two years.

Besides the tight job market, an increasing number of grown-ups are also reluctant to stand on their own feet. They prefer to stay with their parents, as they do not want to depart from the life to which they are accustomed. They said they would rather not start the new life that usually comes with a job. Choi Ji-hoon, 30, has already gone through three

different jobs. "I feel most comfortable when I am home because I can do anything I want to and my parents provide me with everything," he said.

Choi first found a job with a leading local bank two years ago after graduation thanks to good grades and good English skills, despite intense competition. But he quit in less than a year because he became bored doing the same work every day although he received a high salary and other benefits. Choi then found a job at a leading local electronics firm. But he left after five months because of the unfriendly and depressing office atmosphere, Choi said. He got himself another job at a high-tech venture firm. But he quit again in less than two months after a quarrel with a boss over his work schedule. He plans to stay home for the time being and is considering going to the United States for graduate school.

Meanwhile, some grown-ups continue to depend on their parents for support as they choose job satisfaction over a well-paid job. They work in a job that satisfies them despite little financial payoff. They quit a job right away if it does not serve their interests.

Kim Myong-sook, 28, works as a stage hand at a local theater in Taehangno, central Seoul, even though she knows that she will not be able to make a living at the job. "My parents still cover my living expenses and I do not see a bright future with my job," Kim said. She added that she does not care much about the future as long as she enjoys what she is doing now.

The NSO said that the average monthly salary of urban households headed by those in their 20s rose 6 percent to 1.6 million won (\$1,540) in the third quarter from a year ago. The transfer income that the households of 20 somethings received from their parents and other sources increased by 30 percent to 456,000 won over the same period. Also, urban households headed by those in their 30s saw their transfer income rise 40 percent during the one-year period.

The trend indicates that households of younger adults are receiving more financial support from their parents after they become independent.

The NSO official said that if those in their 20s and 30s who live with their parents were included, the total amount of transfer income from parents to offspring would be much higher.