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Analysis of Vulnerabilities in Out-of-School Youth and Strategies for Self-Reliance Support[1)]

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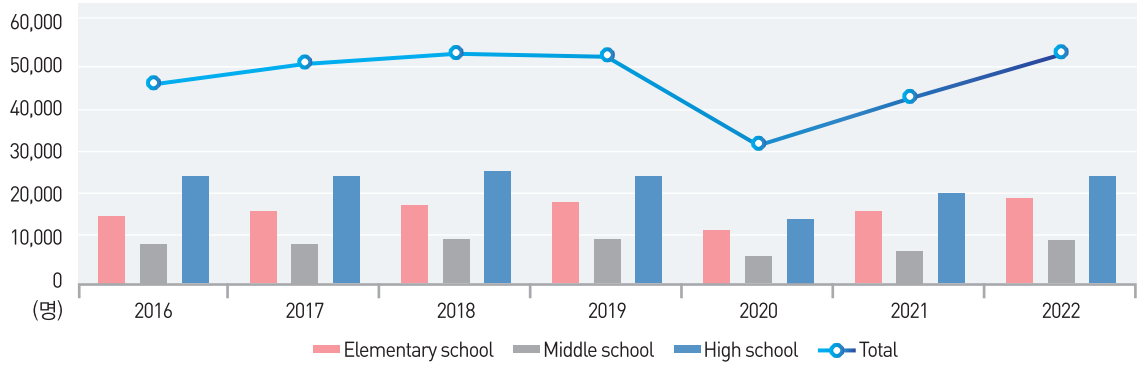
Summary

- The objective of this study is to examine the vulnerabilities that youth experience after leaving school. In particular, this study focuses on the multifaceted disadvantages and challenges youth face that may interfere with their healthy development and independence. This study also aims to explore approaches that can support out-of-school youth, enabling them to overcome such difficulties and successfully transition to independence.
- A review of administrative statistics and theoretical considerations such as a rights-based approach were performed to identify the current status and disposition of out-of-school youth. Additionally, by utilizing the raw data from the 2021 Out-of-School Youth Survey, which was conducted on a national scale, secondary data analysis was also performed. Furthermore, based on in-depth interviews with three groups of out-of-school youth with varying past experience of support and age ranges, out-of-school experiences and needs for support were explored. These include the vulnerabilities and challenges faced by youth, overcoming factors, and experience with support. Investigations were conducted on relevant academic and field experts, as well as focus group interviews (FGIs) conducted with two groups of practitioners in charge of out-of-school youth support. Based on the investigations and interviews, vulnerabilities and issues faced by out-of-school youth were diagnosed and feedback regarding policy tasks were collected.
- As a result, this study proposes the following five policy directions to support out-of-school youth: ① prioritizing support of the holistic health and development of out-of-school youth, ② offering personalized support tailored to their characteristics and needs, ③ preferentially enhancing their capability for career development before seeking to improve their vocational competence, ④ reviewing the identities and directions of out-of-school youth support programs (such as out-of-school youth support centers) and ⑤ ensuring the guarantee of equal rights shared by in-school and out-of-school youth, while expanding the accountability shared by the national and local governments. Based on these policy directions, 12 policy tasks and 22 specific initiatives were also suggested, with respect to 3 sectors (self-reliance support activities, delivery systems, and environmental considerations for out-of-school youth).

1) This article is the excerpt and summary from 'A Study on the Analysis of Vulnerabilities in Out-of-School Youth and Research on Methodology for Self-Reliance Support,' the 2023 research project of the National Youth Policy Institute.

1. Necessity and Objective of this Study

• The number of youth leaving school maintained a level of about 50,000 every year prior to the outbreak of Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) and had been increasing despite the decreasing population of school-aged youth. As remote learning was actively introduced during the pandemic, the number of youth leaving school considerably decreased (as of late February 2021) (Figure 1), but with the subsequent expansion of school attendance, the number of school dropouts increased again. The 2022 statistics (as of late February 2023) also indicated a larger number of school dropouts after COVID-19 than before. This phenomenon is likely attributable to the resumption of studying abroad at an early age and youth quitting school as attendance once again became generalized.

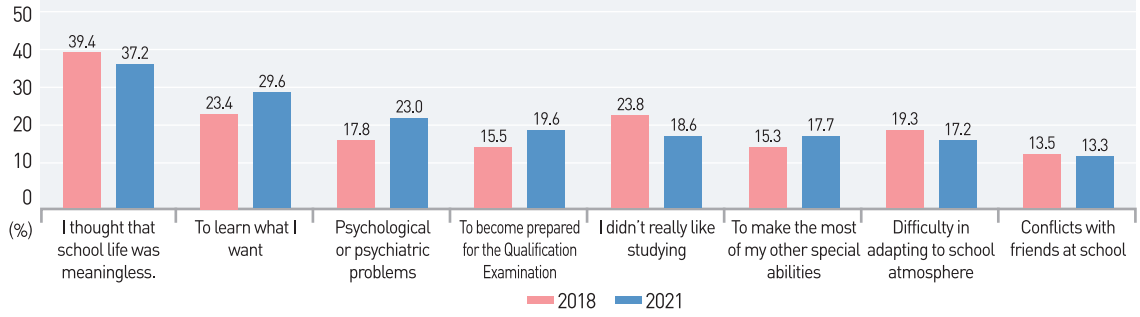


* Source: Status of School Dropouts (as of late February 2023), Korean Education Statistics Service (KESS), Korean Educational Development Institute. Extracted from https://kess.kedi.re.kr/index on September 08, 2023.

The number of dropouts from 2016 to 2022 was retrieved through the above link.

Figure 1 The change in numbers of school dropouts by school level (2016-2022)

• The pattern of change related to out-of-school youth can be seen through not only such quantitative increases but the responses given for leaving school. According to out-of-school youth surveys in 2018 and 2021, the proportion of youth who left school "to learn what I want," because of "psychological or psychiatric problems," and "to become prepared for the Qualification Examination" generally increased by approximately 4% to 5%p in the 2021 survey compared to the 2018 survey, while the proportion who those who left school because "I didn't like studying" decreased by 5.2%p (multiple answers allowed) (Figure 2).



Note: The questions allowed multiple answers. Only the items selected by at least 10% of the respondents were graphed.

Figure 2 Reasons for leaving school in out-of-school youth (2018 and 2021 out-of-school youth surveys)

- Such change patterns related to out-of-school youth should garner particular attention, particularly focusing on the vulnerabilities that youth would experience as they are excluded from all available school support systems, due to their physical removal from the school environment. Specifically, out-of-school youth are experiencing numerous vulnerabilities and deficiencies as they are separated from the many tangible and intangible resources they would have access to in school, which leaves them unable to receive the various benefits of the school support system. These benefits include academic support through curriculum, health support through physical activities, school meals, support for social development based on peer relationships, and guidance from teachers. These are benefits that are being provided for their peers in school.

- This study focuses on the higher proportion of out-of-school youth among the school-aged population and the different trends regarding school dropouts than previously shown in terms of causes and characteristics. The study also put emphasis on the necessity of expanded support systems for out-of-school youth, in consideration that youth may experience various deficiencies after separation from the school system, and they should be encouraged to develop as healthy members of society. Based on these aspects, this study intends to empirically analyze the vulnerabilities and disadvantages that could interfere with the healthy development and independence of out-of-school youth. This study also seeks to clarify the consequences of these vulnerabilities and the resultant serious problems that could arise. Finally, given the in-depth understanding of vulnerabilities of out-of-school youth, evidence-based methods for self-reliance support were presented.

2. Study Methodology

- Literature study: Review of administrative statistics on the status of school dropouts, theoretical considerations regarding vulnerabilities, rights-based approaches, and review of policy-related and administrative data

- Quantitative research: Secondary data analysis (descriptive and multivariate analyses) through selecting parameters related to vulnerabilities, disadvantages, difficulties, and support, which were selected from the raw data of the 2021 Out-of-School Youth Survey

- Qualitative research: Conducting in-depth interviews and comparative analysis with three groups of out-of-school youth (Group A: adults in their mid-20s, Group B: those transitioning to adulthood in their late teens to early 20s, and Group C: adolescents in their late teens), with analysis conducted of longitudinal data from Group A, which had a long-term cumulative qualitative database without experience in out-of-school youth support (constructivist grounded theory approach)

- Expert opinion survey and field practitioner survey: Conducting the first qualitative survey and second quantitative evaluation in 21 academic and field experts, analysis of current issues and the importance and priority of policy tasks and directionality (AHP and Borich needs analysis, etc.), and FGIs with two groups consisting of 10 field practitioners from out-of-school youth support centers and youth counseling and welfare centers

- Organization of advisory meetings with academic and field experts to review the research content, secondary data analysis, and interview content; expert workshops to review the reliability and validity of the results of qualitative data analysis; and out-of-school youth policy forums to discuss the implications of community-based field support, as well as working-level policy research meetings for consultation regarding survey content

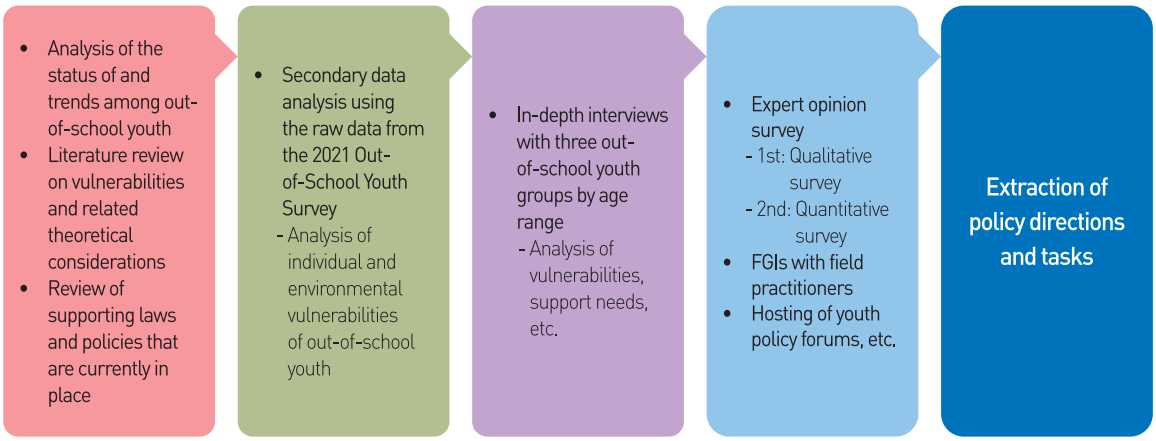


Figure 3 Main content and method of the study

3. Study Results

■ Results of secondary data analysis

• Secondary data was analyzed using the raw data of the 2021 Out-of-School Youth Survey, the latest large-scale survey of out-of-school youth as of 2023.

* The data utilized for the analyses consisted of the results of surveys of 2,489 adolescents who either utilized or belonged to out-of-school youth support centers, support programs such as Naeil Irum School, short-term youth shelters, youth detention centers, probation centers, or unaccredited alternative schools, excluding the data of 802 persons collected at the Qualification Examination reception desk (unweighted). Based on the data, descriptive and multivariate analyses were performed by selecting the parameters to identify individual (psychological, emotional, social, academic, career, etc.) and environmental (institutional) vulnerabilities, disadvantages, and difficulties after leaving school.

• The results of the analyses indicated that, among out-of-school youth, those whose family had a low economic level and lacked in parental support were more vulnerable psychologically, emotionally, and physically, and were faced by greater disadvantages and difficulties after leaving school.

* Among out-of-school youth, self-esteem issues, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation were more pronounced among females, those who were older, those at lower economic levels, and those who lacked parental support. In particular, suicidal ideation was more common among those faced by disadvantages and difficulties after leaving school. In addition, higher rates of overweight and obesity and lower rates of physical activity were shown among those who had neither accessed a relevant organization nor utilized any available services.

• Those whose family had a higher economic level experienced fewer disadvantages and difficulties after leaving school. By contrast, the lower the family's economic level, the longer the time since leaving school, and the longer it took to receive support, with more difficulties experienced after leaving school. Furthermore, more respondents with this background

regretted the reduced opportunities for knowledge acquisition due to leaving school.

* In cases of those who had a higher family economic level, higher levels of parental support, and more experience with organizations and services, they show more positive outcomes in career attitudes.

- Those who had a counselor when leaving school more frequently answered that they received support-related information or had experiences with support organizations and services. The respondents reported that they had fewer opportunities to make friends as time passed after leaving school. There were also differences in plans when leaving school, the timing of career decision-making, how long it took to receive support, and experiences with utilizing organizations and services.

- The timing for career decision-making was faster among those with a shorter time spent after leaving school and no experiences of disadvantages or difficulties after leaving school. Additionally, the time it took to receive support was shorter when relevant information was given when leaving school.

- Multivariate analysis showed that respondents' economic level, parental support level, and school performance served as important factors for the psychological and emotional well-being of out-of-school youth. Out-of-school youth who lived in rural areas or were out of school for a longer period of time showed more negative outcomes in career decision-making and attitudes. The longer the time spent after leaving school, the more respondents felt the need for career exploration experiences, vocational education and training, and counseling regarding worries.

  * Female adolescents more frequently expressed a desire for career-related support (learning and career mentoring, counseling and information regarding school admissions, career exploration experiences, etc.) than male adolescents. The younger they were and the lower their parental support and school performance levels, the higher the tendency to disagree with the need for learning and career-related support.

■ Results of in-depth interviews in three out-of-school youth groups

[Qualitative cross-sectional data analysis]

- According to the results of an in-depth interviews in three out-of-school youth groups*, difficulties in career decision-making, school admission, preparation for employment, and psychosocial vulnerabilities were commonly seen among the three groups. However, there were intergroup differences regarding reasons for leaving school, experiences with support and post-dropout pathways, and assessments of their experiences out of school.

  * Group A: Currently adults in their mid-to-late 20s who left school after 2012 and who have received almost no out-of-school youth support.
  Group B: Currently adolescents in their late teens to early 20s who left school around 2020 and have received some out-of-school youth support.
  Group C: Mostly adolescents in their late teens who recently left school and are receiving substantial support.

- Group A consisted of adults in their mid-to-late 20s who tended to be independent, as they were employed in most cases. Some were married or had children. Regarding the reasons given for leaving school, most of the respondents selected "school's pressure on them to drop out of school," "conflicts with friends," and "school atmosphere," while only a very small minority selected "actively seeking a new career path." After leaving school, this group experienced numerous difficulties in preparing for a career due to a lack of sufficient support, with many of them overcoming such challenges through their individual will and effort in the career preparation process and transition to independence.

- In Group B, some adolescents were currently attending college or returned to high school, and many were working part-time. The most-commonly reported reasons for leaving school were “difficulties in forming friendships” and “exploration of alternative career paths.” Their support needs were more detailed and specific as they began receiving out-of-school youth support. They were generally satisfied with their decision to leave school.

- The respondents who most recently left school constituted Group C. Most of the adolescents in this group were preparing for admission to college. The most-commonly reported reasons for leaving school included “preparation for college admission” and “almost nothing to learn at school.”

- The adolescents from Groups B and C, who had received substantial support through out-of-school youth support centers, expressed their desire for career aptitude exploration and counseling, as well as practical college admission support.

- Overall, negative emotions such as regret, anxiety, discouragement, and depression regarding leaving school were observed, and weaknesses in social and cultural capital such as school friends and peer culture were also identified. Furthermore, respondents felt uncomfortable in proving themselves because of negative social perceptions.

- The main analysis of the results of the in-depth interviews with these three groups is presented in Figure 4.

	Reason for leaving school	Experience with support	Current activity	Evaluation/Emotions*
Group A • Mid-to-late 20s • Dropped out around 2012-2015	• Insufficient attendance • Bored with school life • Not interested in studying • Bullying	• Vocational school • Employment Success Package program • Support of Qualification Examination from the KDream Center(1 out of 10 interviewees)	• Workers: delivery business, position at a factory run by a large company, full-time position at an IT company, nursing assistant, security work, part-time job, childcare, attending graduate school, etc.	• Satisfaction/positive evaluation • Amplification of regret over time • Ambivalent feelings, efforts for acceptance
Group B • Late teens to early 20s • Dropped out around 2018-2021	• Tired of stereotypical school life; feeling there is no need for school • Difficulty in forming friendships • Exploration of alternative career paths • Entrance into college	• KDream Center: Qualification Examination, internships, private educational institute tuition fees, meals, experiential/cultural activities, work training, etc. • Naeil Irum School • Youth shelters, alternative educational institutions, etc.	• High school students (returning to school) • College students; a temporary leave of absence from college • Part-time job • Attending a private educational institute • Preparation for college admission	• Highly satisfied • No regrets due to the support from the KDream Center • Difficulty in managing personal life • Feeling regret about wasting time
Group C • Mid to late teens • Dropped out in 2022	• Almost nothing to learn at school • Thought that studying at school is meaningless; higher test pressure • No desired curriculum • Difficulty in forming peer relationships • Better prepared for college admission	• KDream Center: Qualification Examination, admission counseling, college preparatory classes, internship/job experience, support for certificate acquisition, meals/health check-ups, cultural and artistic experiences, club activities, etc.	• Preparation for college admission (8 out of 10 interviewees) • Part-time job • Vocational training • Internships	• Highly satisfied in most cases • I should've quit school sooner (expected to do better in trial examinations) • Regrets

* Note: The * mark indicates feelings regarding leaving school.

Figure 4 Main content and method of the study

[Qualitative longitudinal data analysis]

- The results of qualitative longitudinal data analysis in Group A indicated that most of the respondents experienced feelings of fatigue or frustration in the school admission process, during career exploration, or during the job search as they started social life without out-of-school youth support. This was also the result of negative social perceptions and alienation due to a lack of experience with peer relationships.

- The cases analyzed were divided into the following categories: high occupational aspirations and high vulnerability perceptions, high occupational aspirations and low vulnerability perceptions, and low occupational aspirations and low vulnerability perceptions. Each respondent coped with their vulnerabilities strategically, but predominantly through personal effort, acceptance of their current situation, or evading reality.

- The significance of dropping out of school in the process of perceiving and responding to vulnerabilities was recognized differently over time and was based on relative assessments on respondents' current level of job satisfaction. Their reflections and acceptance of this aspect also seemed fluid.

Results of expert opinion survey

- The opinion survey in academic and field experts was used to extract current issues related to out-of-school youth, which include the following: insufficient opportunities for enhancing the capacity to form social relationships, increased concerns regarding mental health, serious problems regarding youth who are unprotected and unsupported at school and at home, diversification of out-of-school youth characteristics, and the increased tendency toward seclusion and isolation.

- The most vulnerable aspects included a lack of sociability development and human relationship skills due to limited social experiences and interpersonal relationships, a lack of a sense of belonging, a lack of protection and support at school and at home, and exclusion from universal well-being through institutionalized public education.

- The results of the Borich needs analysis for the self-reliance of out-of-school youth presented the following methods for self-reliance support: psychological support, education allowance for out-of-school youth, housing assistance and ensuring a stable environment, financial support to enhance motivation to participate in programs, and various opportunities to gain job experience.

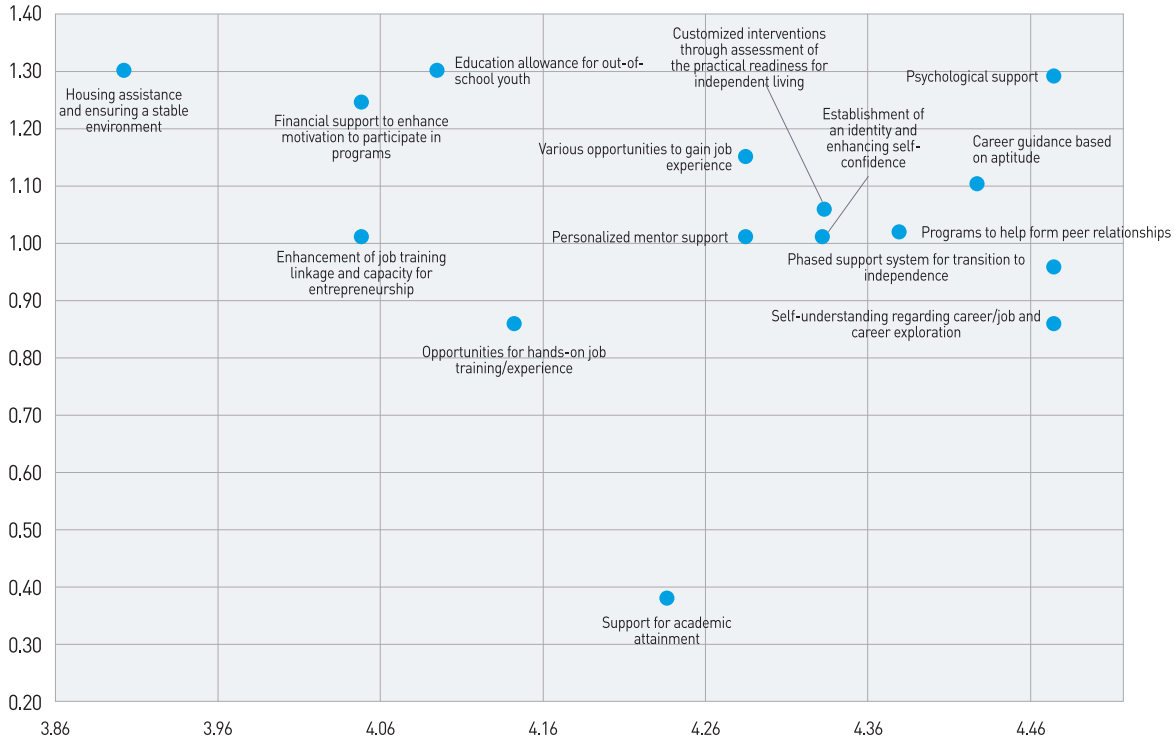


Figure 5 Diagram of Borich needs analysis results for the methods of self-reliance support for out-of-school youth

- The results of Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) analysis for key tasks extracted the following priorities: psychological support, career and academic support, provision of opportunities for sociability enhancement, and improvement in service delivery systems and supporting methods.

- The deficiencies with respect to support included a lack of counseling expertise, a lack of linked support for job training and entrepreneurship, insufficient support for college admission, insufficient support for self-development programs, and insufficient support for cultural activities and dedicated spaces.

- The results of Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) analysis for policy directivity extracted the following priorities: personalized support tailored to youth's characteristics and needs; enhancing support for psychological, emotional, social, and physical health; improved operation of KDream Centers; increased emphasis on career guidance, career support, and self-reliance support policies; and the enjoyment of equal rights for youth both in and out of school.

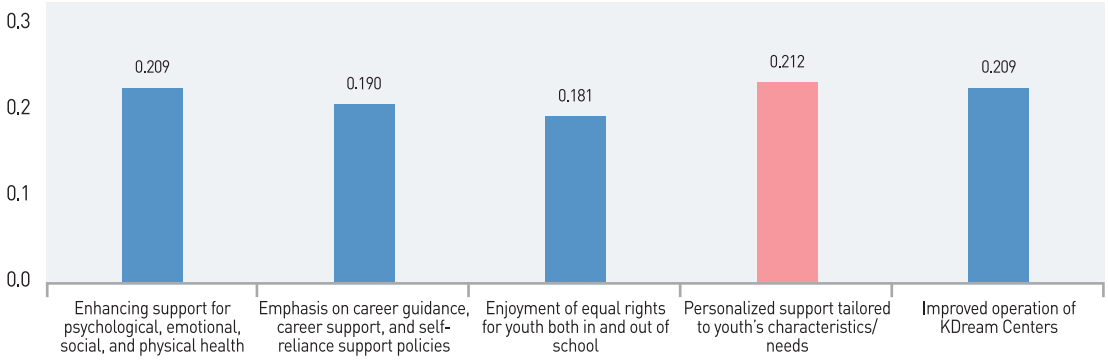


Figure 6 Priorities for directivity of future support policies

- The priorities set for the future roles and functions of out-of-school youth support centers, in order of importance, consisted of the following: ① enhancement of the case management function for out-of-school youth, ② expansion of local networking functions of centers for out-of-school youth support, ③ enhancement of regional resource linkage and cooperation, ④ focusing on personalized support tailored to age, characteristics, and needs of out-of-school youth, and ⑤ support for the acquisition of various capabilities.

■ Results of Focus Group Interview (FGI) with field practitioners

- FGIs were conducted with two groups consisting of field practitioners from out-of-school youth support centers and youth counseling and welfare centers. The results of these interviews indicated that, in recent years, out-of-school youth had set clear goals for their careers, were exposed to interpersonal stress, and were at an increasing risk of mental health issues.

- The vulnerabilities reported by field practitioners included psychological and emotional complications, difficulty in managing day-to-day lifestyles, feelings of not belonging, an inability to take part in activities, emotions relating to prejudice and discrimination, and difficulty in exploring and preparing for careers.

- The methods proposed to overcome these vulnerabilities included enhancing capabilities related to identifying out-of-school youth, providing out-of-school youth with professional psychological counseling, guaranteeing them with equal and fair educational conditions, providing them with personalized career support tailored to their particular characteristics and needs, and improving their environments outside of school.

4. Policy Suggestions

- Various data were reviewed and examined, including those from the literature, administrative statistics on the status of out-of-school youth, secondary data analysis based on the raw data from the 2021 Out-of-School Youth Survey, in-depth interviews with out-of-school youth, an expert opinion survey, and FGIs with field practitioners. The results of these data were then divided into two aspects: personal aspects of individual out-of-school youth and environmental aspects that surround youth. Among the personal aspects, numerous issues were extracted with respect to the diversification of out-of-school youth

characteristics and the relatively younger ages of out-of-school youth, as well as the psychological, emotional, social, and mental health problems they encounter. The issues presented from the environmental aspects included exclusion from all universal welfare benefits available at school and disadvantages encountered during career exploration, career preparation, and employment preparation during the process of transitioning to adulthood and independence.

- Based on the study results, this study proposed five following policy directions to support out-of-school youth: ① prioritizing support of the holistic health and development of out-of-school youth, ② offering personalized support tailored to their characteristics and needs, ③ preferentially enhancing their capability for career development before seeking to improve their vocational competence, ④ reviewing the identities and directions of out-of-school youth support programs (such as out-of-school youth support centers), and ⑤ ensuring the guarantee of equal rights shared by in-school and out-of-school youth, while expanding the accountability shared by the national and local governments. Based on these policy directions, 12 policy tasks were also suggested with respect to 3 sectors (self-reliance support activities, delivery system, and environmental considerations for out-of-school youth), as shown in Figure 7.

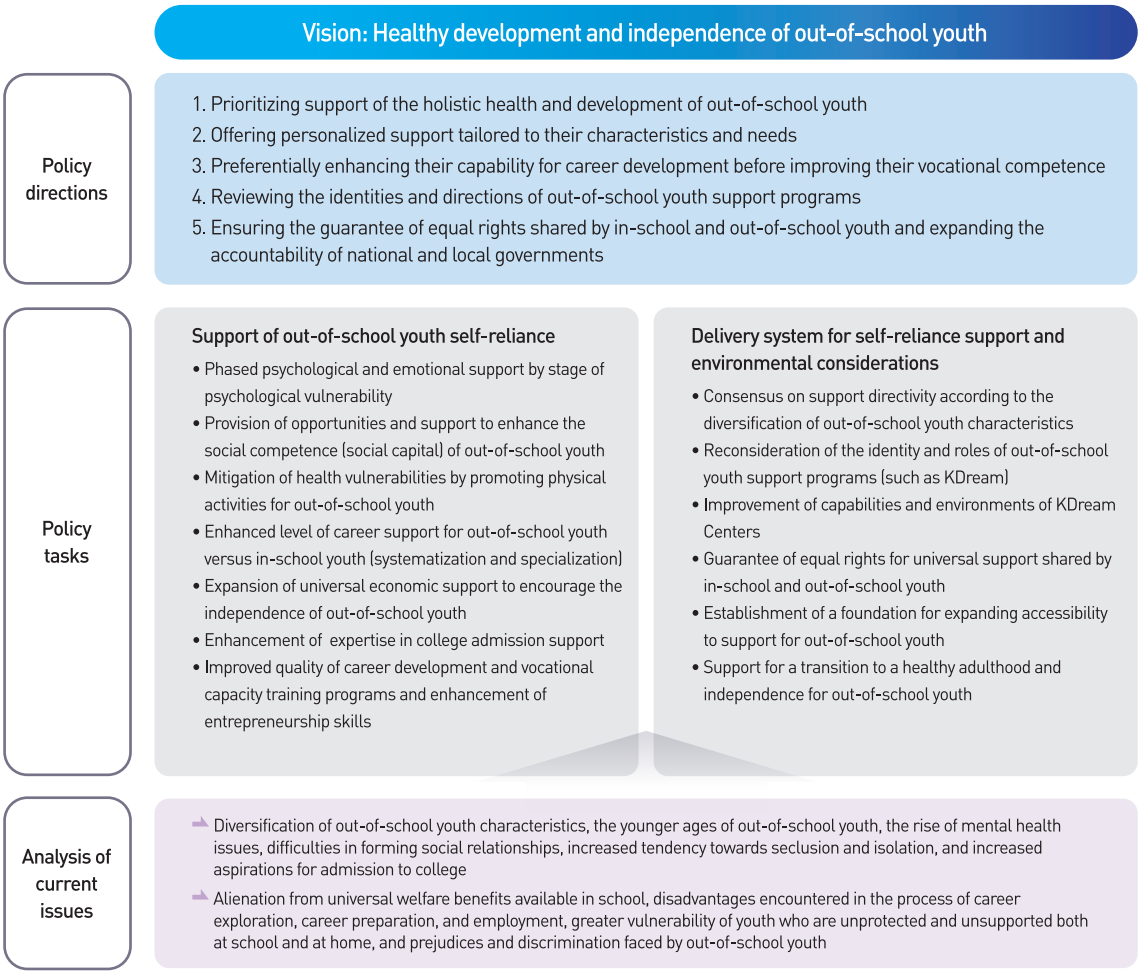


Figure 7 Policy directions and policy tasks for out-of-school youth self-reliance support

• Regarding the policy tasks and initiatives proposed by sector, the policy tasks proposed for "I. Support of out-of-school youth self-reliance" included the following: phased psychological and emotional support by stage of psychological vulnerability; provision of opportunities and support to enhance the social competence (social capital) of out-of-school youth; and mitigation of health vulnerabilities by promoting physical activities for out-of-school youth; enhanced level of career support for out-of-school youth versus in-school youth (systematization and specialization); expansion of universal economic support to encourage the independence of out-of-school youth; enhancement of expertise in admission to college support; and improved quality of career development and vocational capacity training programs and enhancement of entrepreneurship skills. The relevant initiatives are as presented in the following table.

Table 1 Sector-specific policy tasks and initiatives for " Ⅰ. Support of out-of-school youth self-reliance"

Policy tasks	Initiatives
Ⅰ-1. Phased psychological and emotional support by stage of psychological vulnerability	Ⅰ-1-1. Counseling support by stage of psychological vulnerability for out-of–school youth
	Ⅰ-1-2. Enhancing the expertise in support for adolescents at a high risk of mental health issues, as well as vulnerable adolescents
Ⅰ-2. Provision of opportunities and support to enhance the social competence (social capital) of out-of-school youth	Ⅰ-2-1. Provision of opportunities to interact with peers to overcome social vulnerabilities such as seclusion, isolation, and alienation
	Ⅰ-2-2. Support of programs to enhance interpersonal skills and communication skills for greater social adaptability
Ⅰ-3. Mitigation of health vulnerabilities by promoting physical activities for out-of-school youth	Ⅰ-3-1. Provision of opportunities for physical activities through linkages with various systems in the relevant community (e.g., participation in local sports clubs, etc.)
Ⅰ-4. Enhanced level of career support for out-of-school youth versus in-school youth (systematization and specialization)	Ⅰ-4-1. New insertion of legal provisions that specify career support in detail
	Ⅰ-4-2. Support of systematic, customized career planning and career preparation for out-of-school youth
	Ⅰ-4-3. Expanded opportunities for career exploration and experience through linkages with local specialized institutions (career experience support centers)
Ⅰ-5. Expansion of universal economic support to encourage the independence of out-of-school youth	Ⅰ-5-1. Expanded allowance for participation in out-of-school youth support programs
	Ⅰ-5-2. Expanded economic support for youth exposed to vulnerable environments
Ⅰ-6. Enhancement of expertise in college admission support	Ⅰ-6-1. Enhancement of expertise and substantiality in college admission support (utilization of retired teachers, etc.)
Ⅰ-7. Improved quality of career development and vocational capacity training programs and enhancement of entrepreneurship skills	Ⅰ-7-1. Enhanced quality and accessibility of career development and vocational capacity training programs
	Ⅰ-7-2. Enhancement of entrepreneurship skills for out-of-school youth

※ The details of the policy task "I-1. Phased psychological and emotional support by stage of psychological vulnerability" were diagrammed as shown in Figure 8.

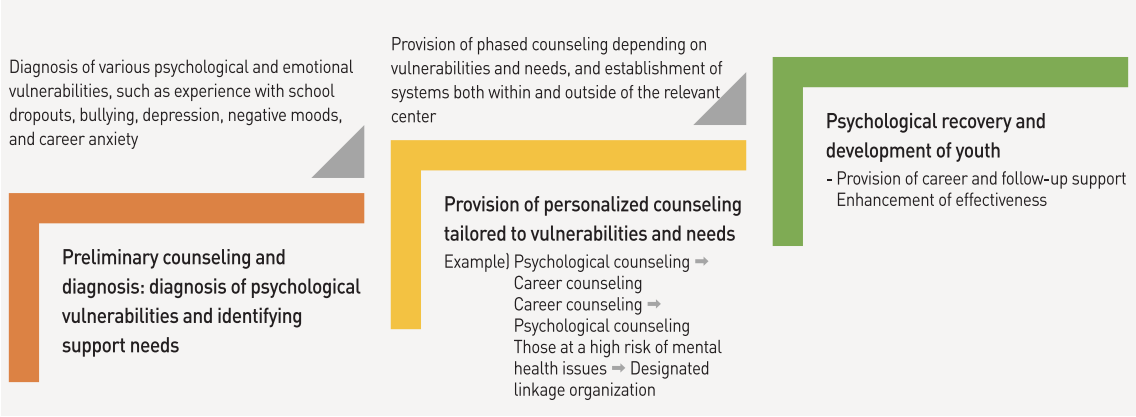


Figure 8 Phased psychological and emotional support for out-of-school youth considering their psychological vulnerabilities

- In "II. Delivery system for out-of-school youth self-reliance support," the policy tasks proposed included consensus on support directivity according to the diversification of out-of-school youth characteristics, reconsideration of the identity and roles of out-of-school youth support programs (such as KDream Centers), and improvement of capabilities and environments of out-of-school youth support centers. Relevant initiatives were presented as below.

Table 2 Policy tasks and initiatives for "Ⅱ. Delivery system for out-of-school youth self-reliance support"

Policy tasks	Initiatives
Ⅱ-1. Consensus on support directivity according to the diversification of out-of-school youth characteristics	Ⅱ-1-1. Achievement of intersystem consensus on the directivity of out-of-school youth support
Ⅱ-2. Reconsideration of the identity and roles of out-of-school youth support programs (such as KDream Centers)	Ⅱ-2-1. Discussion and re-establishment of the support scope for out-of-school youth
	Ⅱ-2-2. Enhancement of self-reliance support and case-managing functions for out-of-school youth
	Ⅱ-2-3. Expanded local networking functions of the KDream Center as a hub for out-of-school youth support
Ⅱ-3. Improvement of capabilities and environments of out-of-school youth support centers	Ⅱ-3-1. Enhanced capabilities of out-of-school youth support centers
	Ⅱ-3-2. Improved work environments, such as better treatment for field practitioners in charge of support of out-of-school youth

- The policy tasks proposed for "III. Environmental considerations for support of out-of-school youth self-reliance" included the guarantee of equal rights for universal support shared by both in-school and out-of-school youth and the establishment of a foundation for expanding accessibility to support for out-of-school youth. Relevant initiatives were presented as below.

Table 3 Policy tasks and initiatives for "Ⅲ. Environmental considerations for support of out-of-school youth self-reliance"

Policy tasks	Initiatives
Ⅲ-1. Guarantee of equal rights for universal support shared by in-school and out-of-school youth	Ⅲ-1-1. Provision of equal support irrespective of whether youth attend school and their place of residence
	Ⅲ-1-2. Dissemination and promotion of forward-thinking perspectives regarding out-of-school youth
Ⅲ-2. Establishment of a foundation for expanding accessibility to support for out-of-school youth	Ⅲ-2-1. Enhancement of information linkages and expansion of accessibility to support for out-of-school youth

- Conclusion and discussion: To ensure the healthy development and independence of out-of-school youth, the following issues should be addressed based on the directivity of guaranteeing equal rights and universal support shared by youth both in and out of school. This consists of support of youth's psychosocial and physical health and career, economic support, support for college admission, enhancement of vocational capabilities, improvement in delivery systems, and legal and institutional improvements.

- To provide more effective support systems, post-support case management and continuity of support are necessary, along with a process for alteration of social awareness. In addition, there is a need for the consensus, connection, and collaboration among the support systems where support for out-of-school youth are implemented.

- The overall contents and methods of support in various aspects necessary for the transition to a healthy adulthood and independence of out-of-school youth are summarized in Figure 9.

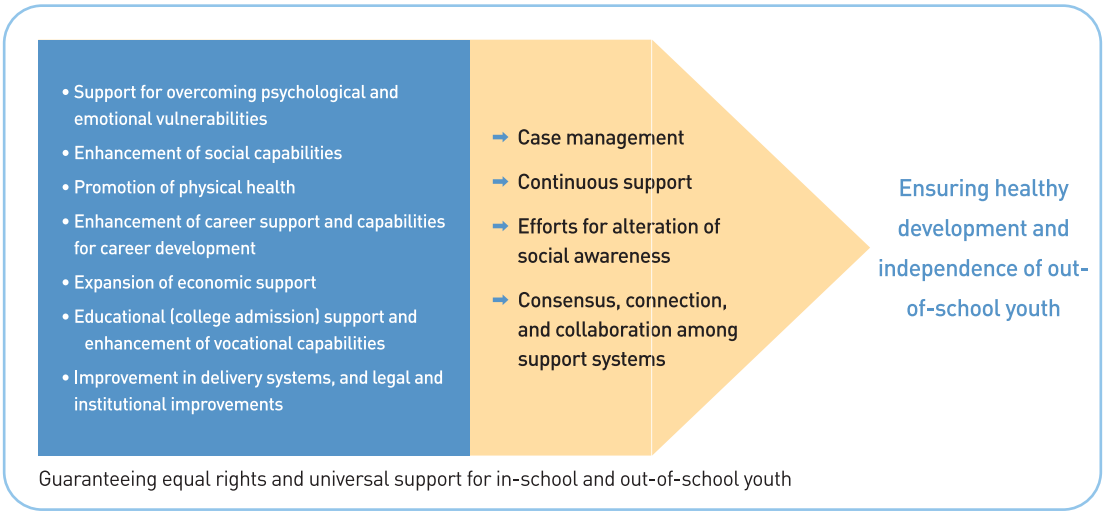


Figure 9 Summary of study results

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