

HOUSING SATISFACTION OF THE KOREAN ELDERLY

Yeun Sook Lee, Hea Ryung Byun, and Jung A Park, Yonsei University
Sook Young Lee, Dongguk University

Traditionally, the Korean elderly have been supported by their families. Since Korea values this family orientation, but has had an underdeveloped social support system, the Korean elderly welfare policy is basically family first and social support second. Under such social and political context, Korea had not developed an elderly housing policy until recently. Today, however, due to industrialization, prolonged life-span, changes in value systems, and new lifestyles, issues regarding the housing environment of the elderly have become prominent, and researchers, industry, and the government have become concerned about elderly housing.

More advanced countries have been concerned about the welfare of their elderly and have developed diverse alternative housing options for the elderly over the past several decades. Numerous authors and institutions have studied actual housing conditions and the elderly's satisfaction with their residential environment (Bailey, 1987; Campbell et al., 1976; Galster & Hesser, 1984; Lansing & Marans, 1969; Mckuley & Offerle, 1983; Nelson & Winter, 1975; Newman & Duncan, 1979; Varady, 1980). Although Korea has a few research studies on the elderly's satisfaction with their housing environment (Ha & Koh, 1995; Lee, 1993; Oh, 1992; Park, 1990), none of these Korean studies has attempted to present a nationwide picture of housing conditions for the Korean elderly.

The major purpose of this study was to identify the satisfaction of the Korean elderly with regard to their current housing environment, and the relationship between the background characteristics of the elderly and their satisfaction. Questionnaires included questions on sociodemographic and economic characteristics, health status, housing characteristics, and general and sub-dimensional satisfaction with the residential environment. The sub-dimensions of satisfaction were convenience, hygiene, safety, and socialization of external and internal residential environments. The data were collected during May-June, 1997 through face-to-face interviews using structured questionnaires. The study included a nationwide sample of 1,200 elderly people over the age of 60 selected by probability proportionate to size sampling, cluster, and random sampling method. The data were analyzed with frequency, percentage, and Chi-square test using the SAS package.

The major findings of this research were as follows:

- 1) 73% of the subjects were generally satisfied with their current housing environment. The relationship between background characteristics and general satisfaction is not a strong one. The elderly, who were male, former professional/office workers living with a spouse or adult-children, with a high income, in good health, living in a large house that they owned or had lived in a long time, who were middle-sized city residents, tended to be more satisfied with their housing environment in general.

2) In terms of the convenience of the current residential environment, 73% of the subjects were satisfied with their environment. The relationship between background characteristics and the convenience of external/internal facilities is not a strong one. The elderly who were male, currently living with adult-children, more educated, former professional/office workers, in good health, living in multi-family housing or living in their own houses, living in the current dwelling for a shorter time, and big-city residents tended to perceive more convenience in using external/internal facilities of their housing environments.

3) In terms of hygiene in their current housing environment, 77% of the subjects were satisfied with their environment. The relationship between background characteristics and the hygiene of external/internal housing environment, though, is not a strong one. The elderly who were male, in good health, living in larger houses, living in their own house, living in the current dwelling for a long time, and rural or middle-sized city residents tended to have more satisfaction with the hygiene of their external/internal residential environments.

4) In terms of safety in the current housing environment, 80% of the subjects were satisfied with their environment. The relationship between background characteristics and the safety of the external/internal housing environment is not a strong one. The elderly, however, who were male, in good health, living in larger houses, living in their own houses, and middle-city residents, tended to have more satisfaction with the safety of their external/internal residential environments.

5) In terms of the social relationship, 85% of the subjects were satisfied with their neighborhood, and 80% were satisfied living with their adult-children. The relationship between background characteristics and the social relationship, though, is not a strong one. The elderly, however, who were single or lived only with a spouse, living in the current dwelling for a long time, and rural or middle-sized city residents tended to have more satisfaction with their neighborhood. The elderly who currently live with adult-children, live in larger houses, and live in their own houses tended to have more satisfaction related to living with their adult-children.

Generally, majority of the subjects were satisfied with their housing environments in all aspects, especially males, former professionals with a high income, in good health, living in their own houses long time, in mid-sized cities. Subjects of this research were the generation who had experienced a lower quality of residential environment during Korea's early industrial development stage. Their earlier experiences may reflect the tendency for their reports to be more often favorable than would be expected in light of the objective environment. The results of this study do not necessarily mean that there is not a serious need for the development of planned elderly housing to improve the elderly's quality of life. For those who were less satisfied with their housing environment, due mostly to the aging process, planned housing development and alternative ways to improve housing conditions need to be further explored. The results also need to be further analyzed in regard to the propensity for the elderly to move into a planned housing complexes.

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