

Urbanization and Changing Family Structure in Korea

Hyun-Sang Moon
(Senior Fellow, KIHASA)

Yong-Chan Byun
(Senior Researcher, KIHASA)

<Contents>

I . Introduction	IV . Discussion
II . Demographic Situation in the Republic of Korea, 1960–1990	V . Summary and Policy Implications
III . Changes in Family Structure	

I . Introduction

The Republic of Korea has experienced dramatic changes in terms of economy and social life during the last several decades. In other words, the country has been rapidly transforming from rural-oriented economy and social life to urban-oriented economy and social life due to the governmental effort to industrialize the Korean economy. During the process of indus-

trialization, people concentrated in urban areas to look for the opportunities for the improvement of their economic situation or for further education. These processes of industrialization and urbanization have significant impact on every aspects of life in the Republic of Korea, including family life.

Particularly, the urbanization process has significant impact on the structure of the family due to the selective nature of the rural-to-urban migrants . As a consequence of the selec-

* Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs
** Prepared for ESCAP Pre-Conference Seminar on Migration and Urbanization : Interrelationships with Socio-economic Development and Evolving Policy Issues, 21–25 January 1992, Seoul, Korea. The seminar was co-organized by ESCAP, KIHASA, and PAK.

tivity between migrants and non-migrants, there are emerging differences in family structure between urban and rural areas. Therefore, as the society of the Republic of Korea becomes industrialized and urbanized, the family as a social unit also undergoes change in structure.

In this sense, the main purpose of this paper is to study the impact of urbanization on the changes in the structure of the Korean family. To achieve this objective the paper discusses : (1) the current demographic situation in the Republic of Korea, (2) transitional nature of the family structure due to the changes in the demographic and socio-economic situation, (3) factors related with the changes in the family structure, and (4) policy implications.

II. Demographic Situation in the Republic of Korea, 1960 – 1990

Since 1960, the republic of Korea has been experienced rapid socio-economic changes from a traditional agrarian society to a modern industrialized society owing to several rounds of successful implementation of the 5-year socio-economic development plan. For example, per capita GNP in 1960 was less than 100 US dollars, whereas that in 1990 increased to about 6,000 US dollars. Along with this rapid industrialization, rapid demographic transition and urbanization are other aspects of the changes that occurred during the same period.

During the period, efforts to deal with population problems in the Republic of Korea have been focused largely on the reduction of population growth; hence, the national population control program has been a major means of achieving this goal. Due to successful implementation

of the family planning program, the level of fertility has reached below the replacement level. In conjunction with this rapid reduction in fertility, the level of mortality has also improved significantly during the same period. In this sense, the Republic of Korea has virtually completed the demographic transition from high birth and death rates to low birth and death rates during the same period.

Related with the rapid fertility and mortality transition, the rate of growth of the elderly population is much greater than that of the young and working age population. Actually, the rate of growth for the young population(aged 14 and less) reveals negative growth, reflecting the influence of the rapid reduction in fertility; and that of the working age population(aged 15 to 64) is also continuing to decline. However, unlike the other age groups, the annual growth rate for the elderly is relatively constant as about 4 percent, indicating that the elderly population will be expected to increase rapidly in the near future(Table 1).

As can be seen from the table, there has been significant increase in the number and proportion of the elderly population during the last three decades. The number and proportion of the elderly population aged 65 and over increased from 0.7 million(2.9 percent to total population) in 1960 to approximately 2.1 million (5.0 percent to total population in 1990). Thus, the elderly population increased by about 1.4 million elderly persons during the past three decades. Moreover, it is projected that an additional 4.2million will be added by the year of 2020 and, hence, the number of the elderly will reach approximately 6.3 million and the

Table 1. Trends of Major Population Indicators in Korea, 1960-2020

Year	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Total Population ('000)	25,012	32,240	38,124	42,869	46,789	49,683	50,578
Proportion	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
0-14	42.3	42.5	34.0	25.3	21.2	19.1	16.0
15-64	54.3	54.4	62.2	69.2	72.0	71.5	71.5
65+	2.9	3.1	3.3	5.0	6.8	9.4	12.5
Annual Growth Rate(%)							
Total	2.6	1.7	1.2	0.9	0.6	0.6	0.2
0-14	2.6	-0.6	-1.6	-1.1	-0.4	-0.4	-1.6
15-64	2.5	3.1	2.3	1.3	0.5	0.5	0.2
65+	3.2	3.9	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	3.1
Dependency Ratio(%)							
Total	82.6	83.8	60.7	44.5	38.8	39.9	39.9
Young	77.3	78.2	54.6	37.3	29.4	26.8	22.4
Old	5.3	5.7	6.1	7.2	9.4	13.1	17.5
Index of Aging	6.9	7.2	11.2	19.4	31.9	49.1	78.2

Source : J.J. Yoon(1991)

proportion will be 12.5 percent to total population by that year.

As a result of these changes in the age structure of the population of the Republic of Korea, the old dependency ratio is expected to increase continuously, even though the total dependency ratio is expected to decrease, mainly due to the rapid decline in young dependency ratio. Therefore, the index of aging, which is the percentage of the persons aged 65 and over in relation to the persons under 15, will increase significantly.

With the above mentioned demographic transition and changes in the age structure of the population, the rapid urbanization process has also been observed. The Republic of Korea has been experiencing rapid population growth in urban areas along with an unprecedented rate of economic growth in the country. The rapid urban population growth during the last three decades has been caused primarily by a large number of migrants from rural to urban areas, particularly to a few major cities of the coun-

try. About two-fifths of the population of the Republic of Korea reside in the Seoul Metropolitan area as of 1990. As a result of this rapid rural-to-urban migration, the proportion of population residing in urban areas changed from 28 percent in 1960 to about 75 percent in 1990 (NSO, 1991).

The migrants reveal selectivity in terms of sex and age structure (Moon and Han, 1989). For example, about half of the rural-to-urban migrants consisted of the 15-29 age group for the period of 1965-70 (Table 2). The proportion was further increased to 58.4 percent and 60.0 percent for the period of 1975-1980 and 1980-1985, respectively. Therefore, the young adult population was dominant in the composition of the rural-to-urban migrants, which is related to

the push factors in rural areas and pull factors in urban areas in terms of economic and education opportunities. More females than males were out-migrated to urban areas for the period of 1965-1970, whereas more males were out-migrated to urban areas for the period of 1970-1985. This pattern can be explained by industrialization, which was led by rapid growth in the manufacturing sector, mainly concentrated in urban areas, particularly in the Seoul Metropolitan area.

Since the massive out-migration of the young and middle aged population in rural areas, the age structure of the rural population has the trends such that the proportions of children and the aged were increasing, while that of young people were shrinking. This age structure has

Table 2. Age Structure and Sex Ratio of Migrants by Migration Streams, 1965-1985

Age Sex Ratio	1965-70			1975-80			1980-85		
	R-U	U-U	U-R	R-U	U-U	U-R	R-U	U-U	U-R
Age									
5-14	22.5	21.7	19.4	17.9	21.3	18.0	15.2	20.0	18.2
15-29	50.0	42.5	44.2	58.4	40.2	45.7	60.0	39.6	42.2
30-59	24.8	32.8	33.1	20.6	34.9	32.6	21.3	36.6	35.3
60+	2.7	3.0	3.3	3.1	3.6	3.7	3.5	3.8	4.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sex Ratio									
5-14	110	103	103	119	107	103	116	110	104
15-29	82	97	96	77	75	77	76	77	68
30-59	117	117	129	116	118	137	112	118	137
60+	43	49	68	39	51	65	39	53	64
Total	94	101	106	89	95	91	86	94	94

Source : H.S. Moon and Y.J. Han(1989)

Note : R-U refers rural-to-urban migrants

U-U refers urban-to-urban migrants

U-R refers urban-to-rural migrants

the effect of the shortage of the labor population in agriculture and, therefore, the aged and women were become responsible for the agricultural work, which were previously responsible for young and middle aged man.

Related with this age and sex selectivity in rural-to-urban migrants, the unbalanced composition of sex for the eligible population for marriage become social problems in rural areas. In the Republic of Korea, the age of 24-30 for men and the age of 21-27 for women are considered as appropriate age for marriage. However, the sex ratio for the above age groups in rural areas were only 62(Moon and Han, 1989), indicating the shortage of the female partners among rural young unmarried men.

Differentials in fertility level by residence was also observed. According to Choe(1987), the highest level of fertility was found in the rural areas(mean number of children ever born was 4.1); followed by urban areas except Seoul (mean number of children ever born was 2.8) and Seoul(mean number of children ever born was 2.6) in that order, reflecting that the women residing in urban areas may be less affected by the traditional norms of fertility. In other words, women in urban areas has less number of children than their counterparts residing in rural areas. Therefore, these findings indicate that women in urban areas may invest less time for the bearing and rearing of their children, reflecting that they may have more time available to participate in the labor market.

As a summary of this section, the Republic of Korea has virtually completed the demographic transition from high birth and death rates to

low birth and death rates. Because of the virtually completed demographic transition, the Republic of Korea has encountered the aging problem by the increasing proportion and number of the elderly population. Furthermore, the heavy rural-to-urban migration occurred in the last several decades affect significantly the way of living in the Republic of Korea, particularly the family life. This is because the selectivity of the migrants in terms of their characteristics, particularly age and sex. The sending areas were characterized by the shrinking of the young adults, while the receiving areas were characterized by the over-crowding of youth and students.

III. Changes in Family Structure

As the society of the Republic of Korea becomes industrialized and urbanized, the family as a social unit undergoes change in their structure. Traditionally, the family system in the country was affected by Confucianism. Some characteristics of the Confucian philosophy related with marriage and the family are the universality of the marriage; the prevailing custom of early and arranged marriage; the strong social pressure for having sons; the low status of women, etc. However, as the society of the Republic of Korea has experienced a rapid transformation from traditional agrarian society into modern industrializing society, every aspects of life becomes dramatically changing, including family life. Three major trends in the structure of the family were observed during the last several decades, namely, smaller size of household, increasing trend of nuclear family, and, finally,

increasing trend of one generation household.

First of all, the reduction in the number of household members is observed. As can be seen in the Table 3, the average number of household members in the Republic of Korea were as high

as 5.6 persons per household in 1966. Household in rural areas has revealed relatively larger in the household size compared with that in urban areas. However, the household size continue to decrease to 3.8 in 1990; and there is no differ-

Table 3. Changes in Family Structure by Residence

Year Residence	Generations				Nuclear Family* (%)	Household Size
	1	2	3	4		
1966						
Whole Country	5.7	67.7	24.0	2.6	66.8	5.62
Urban	8.1	74.3	15.9	1.7	72.4	5.27
Rural	4.3	64.1	28.5	3.1	63.7	5.81
1970						
Whole Country	6.8	70.0	22.1	1.1	71.5	5.24
Urban	9.2	75.4	14.9	0.5	76.9	4.88
Rural	5.0	66.0	27.4	1.6	67.5	5.60
1975						
Whole Country	7.0	71.9	20.1	1.0	70.7	5.22
Urban	8.7	76.3	14.5	0.5	73.8	4.99
Rural	5.4	67.6	25.6	1.4	67.6	5.44
1980						
Whole Country	8.3	73.1	17.6	0.6	72.9	4.76
Urban	9.7	76.5	13.5	0.3	74.6	4.63
Rural	7.6	68.3	23.2	0.9	70.3	4.93
1985						
Whole Country	10.5	73.3	15.8	0.5	75.3	4.53
Urban	10.3	76.5	12.9	0.3	76.7	4.30
Rural	10.8	67.0	21.4	0.8	72.4	4.44

Source : T.H. Kwon(1991)

* Nuclear family refers those of couple only, couple and unmarried child(ren), and single parent and unmarried child(ren).

ence between urban and rural areas by 1990 (NSO, 1991). Therefore, declining household size as a whole and reduced gaps in household size between urban and rural areas are important trends observed during the last three decades.

Second, proportions of nuclear families were dominant type of household regardless of residence. However, the proportions of two generation families were higher for urban areas and those of three generation families were higher for rural areas. The table reveals that the proportions of two generation families were slightly increased from 74.3 percent in 1966 to 76.5 percent in 1985 for urban areas and from 64.1 percent in 1966 to 67.0 percent in 1985 for rural areas. However, the proportions of three generation families were slightly declined from 15.9 percent in 1966 to 12.9 percent in 1985 for urban areas, whereas those of three generation families were rapidly declined from 28.5 percent in 1966 to 21.4 percent in 1985 for rural areas. These figures suggest that nuclear family type is dominant and increasing trends for both urban and rural areas, while the extended family type were decreased. Therefore, nuclearization in family type is another aspect of the changing patterns in the family structure.

Third, as can be seen from the same table, the proportion of one generation families in both urban and rural areas reveals increasing trend. However, those of one generation families increased more rapidly for rural areas. The proportions were increased only 2.2 percent point for urban areas, whereas those were more than doubled for rural areas. Choi(1990) also report that about 11 percent of the households in

urban areas and about 13 percent of households in rural areas were one person household. Furthermore, he also report that couple-only-household in rural areas were more than double of those in urban areas. Therefore, the increasing trend of the one generation families, particularly in rural areas, reveals the changing patterns in family structure in Korea.

As a summary of this section, three major changes in the family structure were identified in this section as the consequences of the rapid industrialization and urbanization in the Republic of Korea. The three major trends were smaller size of household, increasing trend of nuclear family, and, finally, increasing trend of one generation families, particularly in rural areas.

IV. Discussion

Wirth(1938) argued in his classical essay, "Urbanism as a Way of Life", that size, density, and heterogeneity were the key elements determining the social organization and the behavior in the urban community. Relating on the family structure, he argued that as the size, density, and heterogeneity in urban community increased, the declining urban reproduction rates, rising women's participation in labor market, late marriage, shrinking kinship networks, and changes in the traditional norms and values among the urban residents, can be observed. Like the above argument of Wirth, industrialization and urbanization experienced during the last several decades also significantly affect the Korean family structure in several ways.

First, the family in the Republic of Korea became a consumption unit, particularly in urban

areas. In traditional agrarian society, a family played a significant role as a principal unit of production. In that society, the whole family members were expected to work together in the less diversified agricultural work. Generally, father had the authority to control the family work at that time. However, as the society become industrialized and urbanized, the role of father is changed into other than the roles played in the traditional society. Generally, they are expected to work outside the household and make earnings for family living.

In recent years, there is also increasing trend of women's working as the society becomes more complicated due to industrialization and urbanization. In this sense, both father and mother played in similar roles in terms of making money. These changes in the social structure affect significantly about the roles of the family members, particularly conjugal relations or intergenerational relations, which reflect the obscureness of the traditional division of labor within the family members.

Second, the expansion of factory or company employment made young adults less dependent on their family. Since majority of the factories were located in the city, many young adults were migrated into city to find jobs at the factory or company. After they employed at the factory or company, they become financially independent from their original family due to their earnings in urban area. Because of their independence, the authority of the household head become weakened. Along with these financial independence among rural-to-urban migrants, industrialization brought the development of the facilities, such as, electric products, which made

them easy to live apart in urban areas from their families of rural areas.

This situation had special significance for women. They no longer had to stay at home to take care of their family members. Rather they have lots of opportunities to work outside of their households, because of the benefit of the development of the electric products, which reduce their burdens about their household chores. This implies that there may be rising proportion of unmarried people among young adults and, hence, increased the age of the first marriage regardless of gender. Furthermore, the gaining economic power of women by working outside the household may contribute to the recent trends of the rising divorce rate in the Republic of Korea. This may have implications about the changing nature of the traditional universality of marriage and, further, changes in norms and values regarding on marriage.

Third, children were no more considered as an economic asset for the family. Instead, they become liabilities. As the Korean society become industrialized and urbanized, child labor was prohibited by law. Another factor might be the requirement of the formal schooling for the children to adjust to the rapidly changing social environment. Therefore, the child in Korea had to go school for longer period, resulting lengthening dependences on their parental support. Recently, the value of children as a security for the old ages were significantly lowered due to the changes in the norms and values of the young generation about the care of the elderly. In this sense, along with the successful family planning program, the fertility of the people of the Republic of Korea, particularly in urban ar-

eas, were declined due to the changing value of the children. This declining fertility affect the size of the household.

Fourth, as the process of urbanization in the Republic of Korea become progressed, the majority of the young adult in rural areas were migrated into cities as mentioned above and comprising nuclear family by living apart from their elderly parents who left over in rural areas. The limited and expensive living space in urban areas as well as the reduction in fertility level were also contributed to the formation of the nuclear families in urban areas.

Fifth, the reduction in fertility and rising of the age at marriage affected the family life cycle in the Republic of Korea. Generally, the family life cycle refers a series of critical stages through which the family passes. As the family unit passes through specific stages, role expectations, obligations and responsibilities also changes.

There were significant changes in the family life cycle during the last several decades in the Republic of Korea. Because of the reduction in the fertility level, the time spent for the bearing and rearing of their children for women were reduced significantly. The time interval between the first child born and the entrance to elementary school for the last child were decreased from 18.7 years for 1935 to 12.5 years for 1975. And, due to the extension of the life expectancy at birth, the time interval between the marriage of the last child and the death of the spouse were increased from 4.1 years to 16.0 years for the same period(KIPH, 1985). This indicates the lengthening time spent as an empty nest stage for the older people in the Republic of Korea. This is another aspects of the chang-

ing family structure of increasing trend of the one generation elderly families which were left over by leaving of their children.

Therefore, as consequences of the several factors mentioned above, such as, changes in age structure due to selective rural-to-urban migration, lengthening the years of the schooling for their children, limited and expensive living space in urban areas, rising age at first marriage, rising trend of the participation in the labor market for women, and changes in the family life cycle, all of these factors have impact on the changes in the family structure of the society in the Republic of Korea during the last several decades.

The above mentioned changes in the family structure affect the roles and functions of the family system in the Republic of Korea. Related with the reduction in the family size, the function of the family on the bearing and rearing of the child were weakened compared to those of the traditional extended family system. However, the desire to provide more opportunities in terms of economical materials or emotional affections to their children were even increasing; resulting the social problem of the over-protection of the children.

Contrast to these over-protection of the children, the elderly who were not living together with their adult children were generally neglected from the formal and informal support system. This becomes another social problems in the Republic of Korea regarding how to care and support of the needed elderly, since the extension of the life expectancy at birth has changed the age structure of the population of the country because more elderly can be survived into older years. Traditionally, the care of

the elderly were one of the major responsibility of the families. However, as society become urbanized and more families were comprising nuclear family type, the norms and values of the caring of the elderly within the family become slowly changed, requiring more formal support from the government.

The problem of the caring of the elderly were hampered by the rising proportion of the married women who work outside the household. Traditionally, the support of the elderly were the responsibility of the daughter-in-law. However, the process of modernization and urbanization affect the proportion of the married women who work outside of their household. This trend is expected to be further increasing. Therefore, this rising trend of the women's participation in the labor market affect significantly in the changes of the roles and functions of the traditional family.

The elderly living with their adult children become losing their authority on the decision of the family matters because, generally, the adult children has financial power in the family, whereas the elderly generally lack economic power due to retirement or inheritance to their son. In this sense, the elderly become mere liability in the family and whose role is generally confined to take care of the grandson or to provide household chores. These changes in the roles and functions of the elderly in the household can explain the increasing trend of the one generation elderly household, because the elderly prefer independent living arrangement as long as they have means to live independently to avoid conflict with their adult children.

V. Summary and Policy Implications

In this paper, the impact of urbanization on the changes in the family structure were discussed. During the last several decades, Korea experienced the unprecedented rapid socio-economic and demographic changes. The demographic transition were virtually completed and the process of aging due to the lowered fertility and mortality levels is the salient features of the demographic situation in the Republic of Korea. The country is also rapidly transforming from traditional agrarian society to modern industrialized society. As the society of the Republic of Korea becomes industrialized and urbanized, several changes in the family structure were observed during the last several decades, namely, the decreased size of the household members, increasing trend of nuclear family, and the increasing trend of the one generation families. Several factors affecting these changes in the family structure were discussed.

The implications of the changes in the family structure in Korea related with policy are as follows;

1. The urban way of life affect the mate selection by the increasing trend of the love marriage instead of the traditional arranged marriage. This trend along with the changing norms and values regarding on the marriage has impact on the lasting of the marriage. That is, more marriage will be ended by divorce and, hence, there will be more single parent. Therefore, more children will be grown up with single parent.
2. The reduction in the fertility level due to urbanization, the extension of the life expectancy at birth, and early retirement

may have impact on the increasing number and proportions of the elderly who need care. Therefore, the support of the needed elderly will become major policy issues.

3. Due to the urbanization, more female will be participated in the labor market. Therefore, there will be more need for the caring of the children whose parents were both working. In this sense, more facilities for the nursery of the children will be required.
4. The changes in the family structure, particularly due to the dissolution of the families or the changes in the function of the families, will be the major factors for the increase in the number of the deviant behavior. Therefore, to maintain the family intact, it is required to provide governmental as well as the familial support to prevent the dissolution of the families.
5. Due to the urbanization, nuclear family become the dominant type of families in the Republic of Korea. In this type of families, since the function of the protection for the security of the family members, particularly for the aged, is generally weak, the social security system from Government, such as, pension system, medical insurance system, and unemployment payment, etc., should be fully provided.
6. Therefore, the changes in the family structure due to urbanization become big burdens of the Government. To reduce the governmental burdens due to the support for the needed family, the prevalence of the dissolution of the families need to be minimized. To do this, it is required 1) to strengthen the policy for the healthy fami-

ly norms and values regarding on the family system, 2) to expand the social security for the improvement of the family welfare, such as, pension system, medical insurance system, etc., and 3) to give special attention to the needed people, such as, unmarried mother, single parent, the needed elderly, the disabled, children from single parent, etc., by providing fully covered social welfare program.

References

- Choe, Ehn Hyun.(1987) *Fertility Differentials by Migration Status in Korea : An Analysis of Individual Migration History Data, 1983.*
- Choi, Bong.(1990) "Changes in the Household and Family Structures in Korea" in KIHASA, *An Analysis of the Population Dynamics in Korea.* Seoul : KIHASA.
- KIPH.(1985) *Long-Term Plans for Population and Health to the Year of 2000.* Seoul : KIPH
- Kwon, Tae Hwan.(1991) "Changes in the Family Structure" in KIHASA. *The Seventh Socio-Economic Development Plan : Second Preliminary Agenda.* Seoul : KIHASA
- Moon, Hyun Sang and Young Ja Han.(1989) *An Analysis of the Population concentration into Seoul Metropolitan Areas and Migration Patterns by Regions.* Seoul : KIHASA
- NSO.(1991) *Advance Report of 1990 Population and Housing Census.* Seoul : NSO
- Wirth, Louis.(1938) "Urbanism As a Way of Life". *American Journal of Sociology.* Vol. 44.
- Yoon, Jong Joo.(1991) "Change of Support System for the Elderly in Korea". *Journal of Population, Health and Social Welfare.* Vol. 11. No. 1.