

# HOUSING MOBILITY PROPENSITY AMONG THE KOREAN ELDERLY

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find the degree of satisfaction of the Korean elderly with their existing residential environment and their propensity to move. The data were collected through interviews and structured questionnaires. The subjects were 1,200 nationwide elderly over the age of 60 selected by probability sampling proportionate to size, cluster and random sampling method. The data were analyzed with frequency, percentage, and  $\chi^2$ -test using the SAS package. The major findings were as follows: Most subjects were satisfied with their housing environment and had no intention of moving. The subjects were highly satisfied with their residential environment, did not tend to move. This result does not necessarily mean that there is no need for better housing and no need to design elderly housing in Korea. It implies the need for community integrated housing development with flexible service system.

## Introduction

The elderly population in Korea is increasing both in number and the percentage of the nation's overall population and it will continue to do so into and beyond the next quarter-century. From a housing environment viewpoint, such projections lead to one clear conclusion: the needs of aging Koreans are quickly becoming a more substantial concern. The aging are not fundamentally different from any other user group: their needs are subject to change over time, and characterized by tremendous variety (AIA, 1985).

Housing is an important dimension of lifestyle and quality of life for all sectors of the population. For older people, however, housing is more than mere shelter for it may exacerbate many of the social, physical or financial aspects of aging (Victor, 1994). Housing is of great importance to the elderly because they spend the greater portion of their time at home and rely on services from their immediate environment.

Traditionally, the Korean elderly have been supported by their families. Since Korea has ethically valued this family orientation, but at the same time has an

undeveloped social support system, the Korean elderly welfare policy is basically family first and social support second. Under such a social and political context, Korea had not developed elderly housing until recently. However, the simple fact of demographic change regarding elderly housing environment have recently become and will continue to be a major pre-occupation. More advanced countries have been greatly concerned about the welfare of the elderly and have developed diverse alternative housing options for the elderly over the past several decades. Compared with the situation in advanced countries, Korea has only a few research studies on the satisfaction and options for the elderly's housing environment (Koh, 1995; Oh, 1992; Park, 1990).

In more advanced western societies, elderly housing had been first developed in a way that it intended the elderly to congregate and to separate from the facility and community, but recently it has developed in such a way that the elderly can live in their familiar housing and neighborhood or community, with children, relatives, or friends. Because the segregation from the young generation or familiar environment has made the elderly withdraw from their social life they also experience increasing emotional instability, unsafe feelings, and loneliness.

The purpose of this study was to find the degree of satisfaction of the Korean elderly with their residential environment and the propensity to move to a new residential environment.

## **Method**

The data were collected through interviews and structured questionnaires. The subjects were 1,200 nationwide elderly over the age of 60 selected by probability sampling proportionate to size, cluster, and random sampling method. The data collection period was from May, 14 to Jun, 29, 1997. Socio-demographic and economic characteristics along with their satisfaction with current residential environment and propensity to move were all surveyed. The data were analyzed with respect to frequency, percentage, and  $\chi^2$ -test using the SAS package.

## **Literature Review**

The fit between the functional capacity of individuals and their living environments often weakens as one increase in age. Lawton argued that when individuals cope inadequately with their environment, appropriate intervention strategies may either include increasing the capabilities of individuals to cope with their situation or modifying the current housing environment making it more manageable or stimulating (Pirkle, 1994).

Speare et al. (1991) explained that in response to changes in environment or capability, the elderly may make several type of adjustments. They may change their communities (residential mobility) or household composition, or participate in several

service programs (Malroux & Brandt, 1994). Kahana (1982) stated that moving to a new residence, where the fit is better is a third way of restoring equilibrium between the person and their living environment (Longino et al., 1991). Research by Crull, Bode, and Morris (1991) showed the propensity to move was inversely related to satisfaction, and meaning that dissatisfied households had a higher propensity to move than satisfied households. In this research, age of the heads of households including farm households had an inverse effect on the propensity to move. Baillie (1990) found that housing satisfaction might be the most important determinant for the propensity to move.

The most consistent result from extensive empirical research on residential mobility shows an inverse relationship between age and mobility (Lee, 1998; Oh, 1992; Bureau of the Census, 1993; Kain & Quigley, 1975). Newman et al. (1984) interpreted this result in several ways. First, the strong psychic attachment to the current residence as a result of spatial and social relationships continued to strengthen over many years. Second, the lack of knowledge concerning housing alternatives or an inability to search for new housing was due to poor health or lack of transportation. Third, the absence of suitable housing alternatives within the search space defined by the household. Last, an incorrect assessment of the costs of current housing due to an undervaluation of the opportunity costs all contributed to the inverse relationship.

## **Result and Discussion**

### *1. General features of the respondents*

53% of the subjects were female with a mean age of 72.9 years. Living arrangements included living alone (14%), couple (29%), living with unmarried children (10%) and living with married children (42%). Subjects had a relatively low level of education (80% none or some school schooling). The mean monthly household income was 894 U.S. dollars (1 U.S. dollar=1,220 won). Most resided in single-family detached housing (72%) and the average length of residence was 24 years. The mean size of housing was 96m<sup>2</sup>. Residence location includes big-city, rural area (each 40%), and small to middle city (20%).

### *2. Housing satisfaction of the Korean elderly*

To scrutinize the housing satisfaction of the Korean elderly, general and sub-dimensional satisfaction with residential environment including convenience dimension, hygienic dimension, safety dimension, and social interaction dimension were examined. The results are summarized in the table 1.

Generally, the majority of subjects, above 70%, were satisfied with housing environments in all aspects. In terms of satisfaction with sub-dimensional characteristics of residential environment, 73% were satisfied with convenience aspects of both neighborhood and indoor residential environments. While 77% were

satisfied with hygiene, 80% with safety, and 85% with social interaction aspect.

Table 1. General and sub-dimensional satisfaction with residential environment

degree of satisfaction	subdimensional aspect		convenience dimension		hygienic dimension		safety dimension		social interaction dimension									
	general satisfaction f %	neighborhood env. f %	indoor env.		neighborhood env.		indoor env.		neighborhood env.									
			f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%								
very satisfied	276	23.0	325	27.2	334	28.0	464	39.1	421	35.3	516	43.4	454	38.0	581	48.7	239	21.0
satisfied	603	50.3	531	44.4	531	44.5	436	36.8	499	41.8	447	37.6	503	42.1	429	36.0	663	58.3
middle	185	15.4	154	12.9	174	14.6	122	10.8	153	12.8	124	10.4	128	10.7	126	10.6	201	17.7
dissatisfied	98	8.2	142	11.9	117	9.8	131	11.0	101	8.5	78	6.6	76	6.4	42	3.5	31	2.7
very dissatisfied	3	3.0	43	3.6	37	3.1	33	2.8	19	1.6	25	2.1	33	2.8	15	1.3	3	0.3
Total	1198	100.0	1195	100.0	1193	100.0	1186	100.0	1193	100.0	1190	100.0	1194	100.0	1193	100.0	1137	100.0

Considering that the subjects were the elderly population who had long resided in a low-quality residential environment and had lived through the tragic historical experience of the Korean War, the degree of satisfaction was interpreted to be more favorable than would be expected disregarding the impact of the Korean War. Furthermore, during early industrialization, housing conditions were improved tremendously. The conditions of the Korean War and then improvement during early industrialization as compared to the benefits of housing options would certainly influence their responses. The results of this study do not necessarily conclude a lack of serious need for the development of planned elderly housing, which can improve the elderly's quality of life. Since a substantial amount of those, who were less satisfied with their housing environment, were considered to have expressed difficulties of living due to the aging process, planned housing development and alternative ways to improve housing conditions need to be further explored.

### 3. Housing mobility propensity of the Korean elderly

To scrutinize housing mobility of the Korean elderly, the following were included into the moving plan from the current housing situation to a different location: the relationship between housing mobility and the satisfaction with current housing environment, the influencing factor of housing mobility, the relationship between the housing mobility and the preference/necessity of planned housing for the elderly, the individual desire for planned housing, and the preference of planned housing type according to available services and elderly housing alternatives. The results are summarized in tables 2~5.

#### (1) Moving plan from current housing to another location

Table 2. Moving plan from current housing to another location

Category	f	%
having moving plan	123	10.3
having no moving plan	1074	89.7
Total	1197	100.0

N=1,199

In terms of moving plan, the majority of subjects (about 90%) had no moving plan from their existing housing to another location. This result seems to be related to the fact that they have lived for a long time (30-50 years) in their current housing and most of them were satisfied.

Whereas, in the case of the worse conditions such as poor health or loss of spouse, most wanted to live with children, and some wanted to move into planned housing for the elderly.

(2) Relationship between housing mobility propensity and the satisfaction with current housing environment

Table 3.  $\chi^2$ -test between housing satisfaction and mobility propensity

Housing mobility housing satisfaction	moving		no moving		Total		$\chi^2$ (C)
	f	%	f	%	f	%	
satisfied	68	7.7	810	92.3	878	100.0(73.4)	22.89
dissatisfied	55	17.2	264	82.8	319	100.0(26.7)	
Total	123	10.3	1074	89.7	1197	100.0(100.0)	

N=1,199

\* significant  $p < .05$ .

The relationship between housing satisfaction and mobility propensity shows that the subjects who were highly satisfied with their residential environment did not intend to move. The fact that the elderly did not want a new environment seems to be related to their satisfaction with current living conditions as a result of a lack of knowledge regarding the existence of housing options or a misunderstanding of available options by the elderly.

(3) The influencing factor of housing mobility propensity

Table 4. The influencing factor of housing mobility propensity

Category	moving plan general satisfaction item	having moving plan (N=202)				have no moving plan(N=2420)			
		satisfied		dissatisfied		satisfied		dissatisfied	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
indoor environment	housing structure	7	7.4	6	5.6	94	4.8	21	4.6
	housing size	12	12.8	15	13.9	134	6.8	23	5.0
	convenience of housing	8	8.5	15	13.9	201	10.3	33	7.2
neighborhood environment	natural scenery	7	7.4	5	4.6	126	6.4	15	3.3
	air condition of outdoor	7	7.4	7	6.5	135	6.9	22	4.8
	neighborhood facility	9	9.6	5	4.6	125	6.4	18	3.9
	village mood	5	5.3	5	4.6	197	10.1	39	8.5
moving condition	processing for moving	0	0.0	2	1.9	55	2.8	19	4.1
	moving expense	1	1.1	9	8.3	78	4.0	71	15.4
personal relationship	distance from children	4	4.3	6	5.6	72	3.7	12	2.6
	distance from friends/relatives	3	3.2	4	3.7	122	6.2	23	5.0
	relationship with the neighborhood	6	6.4	6	5.6	307	15.7	65	14.1
decision-making	children's opinion	13	13.8	10	9.3	131	6.7	46	10.0
	the neighborhood's notice	1	1.1	1	0.9	21	1.1	2	0.4
emergency counter-plan	preparation for changing situation	2	2.1	4	3.7	39	2.0	6	1.3
information	development of elderly housing	0	0.0	1	0.9	5	0.3	1	0.2
	information of elderly housing	1	1.1	1	0.9	5	0.3	0	0.0
workplace location	workplace location	5	5.3	3	2.8	86	4.4	20	4.0
housing maintenance	rent, tax, etc	3	3.2	3	2.8	27	1.4	24	5.2
	Total	94	100.0	108	100.0	1960	100.0	460	100.0

The important influencing factors of housing mobility propensity were housing size, convenience of housing, children's opinion, air pollution, moving expenses, and personal relationships with the neighborhood, and village atmosphere.

In the case of respondents who had moving plans and were not satisfied with their current living environment, housing size and convenience influenced their plan for housing mobility.

In the case of respondents who had moving plans and were satisfied with their current living environment, children's opinion, housing size, and neighborhood facility influenced their plan for housing mobility.

In the case of respondents who did not have moving plans and were not satisfied with their current living environment, moving costs, relationship between the neighborhood, and children's opinion influenced their plan for housing mobility.

In the case of respondents who did not have moving plans and were satisfied with their current living environment, convenience, and the village atmosphere influenced their plan for housing mobility.

#### (4) Relationship between housing mobility propensity and the preference of planned housing for the elderly

Table 5.  $\chi^2$ -test between the housing mobility propensity and the preference of planned housing for the elderly

preference of planned housing for the elderly		moving plan		having moving pain		having no moving pain		Total	$\chi^2$
		f	%	f	%	f	%		
individual desire for planned housing	no moving	38	33.9	477	51.2	515	100.0	49.3	11.91*
	moving	74	66.1	455	48.8	529	100.0	50.7	
	Total	112	10.7	932	89.3	1044	100.0	100.0	
method of offering service	planned housing	46	38.0	269	25.6	315	100.0	26.8	8.60*
	own housing	75	62.0	784	74.5	859	100.0	73.2	
	Total	121	10.3	1053	89.7	1174	100.0	100.0	
housing alternative for the elderly	current housing	50	40.7	654	61.2	704	100.0	59.1	19.3*
	housing for the elderly	73	59.3	414	38.8	487	100.0	40.9	
	Total	123	10.3	1068	89.7	1191	100.0	100.0	

\* significant  $p < 0.05$ .

To find out the relationship between housing mobility propensity and the preference of planned housing for the elderly, individual desire for planned housing, method of offering services and elderly housing alternatives were surveyed. In the case where planned housing for the elderly was assumed to be offered, the subjects with a moving plan intended to move. The subjects with no moving plan preferred receiving community services while remaining in their own housing. The subjects with moving plans preferred elderly housing that was designed allowing them to live with other elderly and/or their adult-children.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Generally, the majority of the subjects were satisfied with their housing environments in all aspects. But this does not necessarily mean there is no need for better housing. Subjects for this research were the elderly generation who had

experienced the tragic conditions of the Korea War and a low quality of residential environment during Korea's early industrialization. It was natural to think that the influence of these experiences would add a subjective response which would be more favorable than expected in light of the objective environment. Therefore, the desire for planned housing did not stem from dissatisfaction about current housing, but psychological instability caused by present and future drastic changes in Korean society.

Most of subjects had no moving plan from their current housing to another location. In relation to housing satisfaction and mobility, the subjects satisfied highly with their residential environment did not intend to move. The influencing factors of housing mobility were housing size, convenience, children's opinion, neighborhood facility, moving expense, and personal relationship. In the cases where planned housing was offered, the subjects with moving plans were more likely tended to move. And the majority of subjects preferred receiving assistance while remaining in their own housing.

The appropriate direction of Korean elderly housing culture, however, should be community- and family-oriented. In this context, 'Flex-Care Housing System (Park, 1990)' appears promising in its approach to the elderly housing problem since it allows the elderly to live in their community continuously without relocation. along with developing planned elderly housing, community services need to be developed for the elderly living in a conventional housing community. In addition, since the elderly tend to suffer more from poor conditions (unhealthy and/or single) and are highly dependent on their married children, intergenerational coresidence needs to be redefined and reemphasized. The results reflect the current developmental trends of advanced countries and also reveal the value of the three-generational family apartment community as a Korean cultural elderly housing model.

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