

**INTERGENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES  
IN THE SATISFACTION WITH CO-RESIDENCE:  
A STUDY OF KOREAN EXTENDED FAMILIES\***

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*This research examines differences between the elderly and their co-residing married children on the level of satisfaction with living together in an extended family. Data are analyzed from interviews with 94 pairs of mothers-in-law aged 60 and over and co-residing daughters-in-law in Seoul, Korea. According to the differences of the perception of benefits between the two generations, the subjects are divided into four groups: (1) 'mother-in-law-benefited' type; (2) 'daughter-in-law-benefited' type; (3) 'both-highly-benefited' type; and (4) 'both-lowly-benefited' type. The overall results show that mothers-in-law tend to perceive more benefits from co-residence with their adult children and report a higher level of satisfaction than daughters-in-law. The levels of satisfaction with co-residence for each generation are different by type. Both generations in the 'both-highly-benefited' type and 'daughter-in-law-benefited' type reported higher satisfaction and a lower generation gap in the level of satisfaction than any other types. Suggestions for policies which improve the quality of intergenerational relationships are noted.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Korean society has experienced a rapid aging process. The elderly, aged 65 and over, increased from 3.7 percent in 1960 to 5.9 percent in 1995. The proportion of the elderly is projected to grow to 6.3 percent in 2000 to 11.4 percent in 2020 [1, 2]. As Korean society demonstrates a rapid aging process, many researchers have turned their attention to issues related to the elderly [3-5]. Among the many issues, the most frequently discussed are supports for aged parents. This is mainly due to the peculiarity of Korean society, where a majority of the elderly depends entirely on their own children in the later years.

Whereas the proportion of elders living by themselves has been increasing recently [6], many opinion polls indicate that young people still recog-

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nize the importance of residing with their elderly parents. The majority of Koreans tend to believe that the individual family should take a primary role in caring for aged parents.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the differences between the elderly and their co-residing married children on the level of the perceived satisfaction of living together in an extended family. Since most existing studies in Korea focus only on the support of the elderly parents by their children, they are limited in their presentation of the interrelationship between parents and their married children.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### *Overview of the Literature*

Since Korean culture has its unique form of the extended family, this review covers only the empirical studies performed within Korea. Although there exists a few related studies on the elderly done abroad, most of them are about cases of elderly parents and their unmarried children living together [7-10]. Therefore, those studies are not relevant to our interest in the relationship of the elderly with their co-residing married children.

Even among the studies done on Korean parent-children relationships, not many actually fit the interest of this study. Instead, the previous studies deal with either a general overview of the supports for the elderly or the satisfaction of the elderly with their children's support. Because the studies do not include the children's satisfaction in supporting their elderly parents, they are limited in providing knowledge about the mutual relationship between the two generations.

The Korean studies focusing on the socio-demographic characteristics of the elderly and their children tend to distinguish supports for the elderly into three kinds: financial, psychological, and instrumental services [11-14]. First, on the level of financial support, the elderly show differences depending on their age, sex, education, living standard, and family structure. When the elderly are older, less educated, financially incapable, and co-residing with their children, they are more likely to depend upon their children than the elderly under different circumstances. When the children have more education and the elderly live with their children in the same household, the elderly parents are more likely to get emotional support from their children. The elderly also tend to receive more manual services from sons (especially the eldest son), co-residing children, and children with lower income than from their other children.

Second, even though several variables are related to the satisfaction with supports by children, female elderly are less likely to be satisfied with the supports than their male counterparts. As education or income increases, their overall degree of satisfaction with life improves. Health is another important factor in estimating the degree of the elderly's satisfaction. In general, health status is positively related to overall living satisfaction. The degree of participation in social activities is also closely related to the level of satisfaction. When the elderly adhere to traditional family values, their overall satisfaction is reported to be low [11, 15-18]. In addition to these factors, the presence of their spouse, co-residence with married children, and housing type are also other important variables [19].

As previously indicated, existing studies have differentiated the roles of the two generations: children as 'providers of support' and elderly parents as 'recipients of support'. These studies typify the role for each generation and ignore both the independent characteristics of the elderly and the dependent characteristics of the children. These studies also neglect to explain the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the children co-residing with their aged parents.

To overcome the shortcomings of the previous studies, this study aims to analyze the detailed interrelationship between elderly parents and their children in an extended family. Applying exchange theory, we will consider both the children's support for their aged parents and the parent's contribution to the family. Considering both sides will enable us to comprehend intergenerational differences in the level of satisfaction on the basis of an 'exchange system of support and contributions'. By highlighting the interrelationship between the elderly and their children, this study will better grasp the comprehensive nature of both intergenerational ties and the psychological well-being of each party.

#### *Theoretical Background*

It is quite recently that exchange theory has been applied to the field of family studies. In the past, researchers tended to think that exchange theory assumed too many egoistic aspects of the human being to be applied to the study of long-term family relations which require affection and sacrifices. However, this theory is now applied extensively to the study of relationships between parents and children, between lovers, and between couples [20-24]. Scholars have begun to pay special attention to the exchanges between elderly parents and their married children [14, 21, 25-26].

The basic premise of exchange theory is that human beings want to mini-

mize costs while maximizing rewards in the process of interacting with other actors [27]. Each individual has to give the other party corresponding rewards in order to receive benefits. The individual comes to acquire this general 'norm of reciprocity' during the early socialization process. If one party provides continuous rewards and the other party does not reciprocate, then we can expect power differences to occur between them. Since the person who cannot provide proper rewards ends up relying upon the other party, a continuous and balanced relationship cannot be maintained [28].

Equity theory also supposes that human beings will try to maximize the outcome when they interact with other people. This theory, however, focuses on equity more than exchange theory does. If exchange theory emphasizes a give-and-take relationship, equity theory focuses on how much each person may benefit in relation to the amount that each person has contributed. They perceive the relationship is equitable when the benefits of each party is comparable to what they invested and, at the same time, their level of satisfaction increases [29]. Therefore, individuals feel burdened or disappointed when they are over-benefited as well as when they are under-benefited in their relationships.

Based upon the differences of these two theories, researchers assume different relationships according to the theory they have selected. When applying exchange theory, researchers hypothesize a linear relationship between the maximization of profits and the degree of satisfaction. On the other hand, when equity theory is applied, they assume a curvilinear relationship of low satisfaction with the increase or decrease of one party's benefits and high satisfaction with the balanced exchange between the two parties [26, 30-31].

In this study, we will analyze the interaction between elderly parents and their adult children by applying both exchange theory and equity theory. Considering only the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, we will classify the exchange between elderly parents and their adult children into four types: 'mother-in-law-benefited type', 'daughter-in-law-benefited type', 'both-highly-benefited type', and 'both-lowly-benefited

TABLE 1. EXPECTED LEVEL OF SATISFACTION BY THEORY

Types	Exchange Theory		Equity Theory		This Study	
	Mother	Daughter	Mother	Daughter	Mother	Daughter
mother-in-law-benefited	High	Low	Low	Low	High	Low
both-lowly-benefited	Low	Low	High	High	Low	Low
both-highly-benefited	Low	Low	High	High	High	High
daughter-in-law-benefited	Low	High	Low	Low	Low	High

type'. As presented in Table 1, this study generally follows the assumptions of exchange theory. However, for 'both-highly-benefited type,' we follow the assumptions of equity theory. We expect that when both the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are highly benefited, the satisfaction level of both parties will be similarly high.

### *Hypotheses*

#### 1) About Types

(1) Based on the current Korean value system emphasizing filial piety, as the elderly perceive more benefits than costs as a result of co-residence, we expect that the 'mother-in-law-benefited type' will be the most prevalent among the four different types.

(2) As adult children perceive more costs than benefits due to co-residence, the 'daughter-in-law-benefited type' is expected to be prevalent.

#### 2) About Satisfaction with Co-residence

(1) The elderly's degree of satisfaction with the co-residence will generally be higher than that of their children.

(2) The degree of satisfaction for each generation is expected to differ by type.

i) In the 'mother-in-law-benefited type', the mothers-in-law are expected to be highly satisfied and their daughters-in-law are expected to be little satisfied, as the result of co-residence.

ii) In the 'both-lowly-benefited type', both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are expected to be little satisfied.

iii) In the 'both-highly-benefited type', both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are expected to be highly satisfied.

iv) In the 'daughter-in-law-benefited type', the mothers-in-law are expected to be little satisfied and their daughters-in-law are expected to be highly satisfied.

## METHOD

### *Sample*

To test the hypotheses, interviews were conducted in the summer of 1993 in Seoul with 100 pairs of mothers-in-law aged 60 and over and with co-residing daughters-in-law. The samples were selected by using multi-level stratified sampling methods. We divided Seoul into four major districts and then selected 25 mothers-in-law from each district. To search for elderly

women living with their daughters-in-law, we visited individual households, centers for the elderly, and churches. After completing an interview with a mother-in-law, we visited the interviewee's home and interviewed her daughter-in-law. We analyzed only the fully answered 94 pairs of interview results by using spss-pc+. The data were analyzed by utilizing both descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis.

#### *Measures of Variables*

**Satisfaction with co-residence** refers to the level of satisfaction resulting from co-residence with their elderly parents (or their adult children) and is measured by one item. Response categories range from 1(very dissatisfied) to 5(very satisfied).

**Perception of benefits and costs in co-residence** was measured by asking the respondents how they feel about three aspects of services from each party: financial, emotional, and instrumental services. Asking three questions for each aspect, we summed up the total score from the nine items. The higher the respondent score is, the more benefits the party is perceiving from the interaction with other party. And then, the difference in the perceived scores between two in-laws was calculated as a pair. The benefit score of the mother-in-law was subtracted from the benefit score of the daughter-in-law. If the difference score is higher and has a positive value, it is interpreted that the daughter-in-law receives more benefits than the mother-in-law. On the other hand, if the difference score is high and has a negative value, it is interpreted that the mother-in-law perceives more benefits than the daughter-in-law.

**Traditional values** were measured by using ten separate items: residence in elderly-only households, the necessity of having a son, employment of married women, involvement of men in housework and child-care, inheritance by son or daughter, and so on. Responses, which range from '1: strongly disagree' to '5: strongly agree', were coded and summed so that a higher score reflects more nontraditional values.

**Social Demographic Variables** for the elderly group are age, educational level, religion, number of children, current marital status, occupation, retirement, income, and health conditions. For daughters-in-law, the duration of marriage and employment status variables were included in addition to the above variables.

## RESULTS

### *General Characteristics*

The average age of the mothers-in-law was 71.7 years. The proportion of those aged 70 and above (56.5%) exceeds that of those below the age of 70 (43.5%). Approximately 70 percent of them either graduated from elementary school or had less than six years of education, while those who completed junior high school education (13.8%), high school education (9.6%), and college education (4.3%) composed a small proportion among the elderly. The majority of them (75.3%) were widows and only 22.5 percent were living with their husband. As 71.3 percent of the elderly answered that they are currently living with their eldest son, this sample also well represents the nature of the Korean family structure which is based on strong patrilineal relationships.

The average monthly income of the elderly was approximately 350 dollars and the major source of the income was financial support from their children. About 64 percent of the sample reported that they receive money from their children regularly. While 64 percent of all respondents said that they receive financial support from the son who lived with them and another 32 percent from the sons living separately, only 4 percent answered that they receive money regularly from their daughters.

The average age of the daughters-in-law was 39.9 years and their age ranged from 22 to 57 years old. Daughters-in-law's average level of education was much higher than that of the mothers-in-law: 87.2% of them completed high school education. Among the daughters-in-law, the proportion of those who graduated from college was also quite high (43.6%). Their average length of marriage was 15.2 years and the average number of children they had was slightly less than two. Among the daughters-in-law, only 39 percent of them answered that they are currently participating in the labor force and the remaining 61 percent are housewives.

### *Identification of Types*

#### 1) Classification of Types

In order to identify the types of intergenerational relationships, we first calculated the differences in the perception of benefits between the two generations. The total difference scores of the 9 items ranged from -29 to 12, and the mean was -5.64. This result shows that elderly parents tend to perceive more benefits from co-residence as compared with their daughters-in-law.

Considering the skewness of the range, a group with the score below -9 was classified as a 'mother-in-law-benefited type' and the group with the score above 5 was classified as a 'daughter-in-law-benefited type'.

The group which had the score in-between(-8-4) was regarded as having a relatively equitable exchange relationship. This in-between group was further divided into two groups: 'both-highly-benefited type' and 'both-lowly-benefited type'. When both the benefit scores of the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law were higher than the median score, the pair was classified into the 'both-highly-benefited type'.

Among seventy-six pairs who answered all 9 items, 'mother-in-law-benefited type'(37%) was the most prevalent among the four types. About 34 percent of the pairs turned out to belong to the 'both-lowly-benefited type'.

## 2) Background Characteristics by Type

First, some background characteristics of the mothers-in-law were significantly different by type. This difference is shown in Table 2. First, there was a difference with whom the elderly lived in each type. Whereas about 60 percent of the elderly in 'daughter-in-law-benefited type' and 'both-lowly-benefited type' lived with the eldest son, ninety two percent of those in 'mother-in-law-benefited type' were living with the eldest son.

Second, in regard to the elderly's subjective health condition, there is a significant difference among the types. Elder respondents in 'mother-in-law-benefited type' reported the lowest health score, while those in 'both-high-

TABLE 2. THE BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF MOTHERS-IN-LAW BY THE TYPES

	mother-in-law-benefited type (N=28)	both-lowly-benefited type (N=26)	both-highly-benefited type (N=12)	daughter-in-law-benefited type (N=10)	Total (N=76)	
Age	74.0	70.1	73.3	69.2	71.9	n.s
Spouse Alive (%)	7.1	37.5	16.7	22.2	20.5	n.s
Average Number of Children	3.9	3.9	4.3	4.0	4.0	n.s
Co-residing Child eldest son (%)	92.6	61.5	75.0	60.0	74.7	$\chi^2=17.9^{***}$
other son (%)	7.4	26.9	8.3	0.0	13.3	
daughter (%)	0.0	11.5	16.7	40.0	12.0	
Years Co-resided	17.9	13.0	15.4	16.6	15.7	F=2.20*
Health (1-5)	2.5	3.0	3.8	3.1	2.9	F=3.22**
Monthly Income	56	656	226	211	320	n.s
Traditional Value (1-5)	2.3	2.6	2.8	2.9	2.6	F=3.05**

Note: \*\*\*( $p < .01$ ), \*\*( $p < .05$ ), \*( $p < .1$ )



**TABLE 3.** THE BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW BY THE TYPES

	mother-in-law benefited type (N=28)	both-lowly benefited type (N=26)	both-highly benefited type (N=12)	daughter-in-law benefited type (N=10)	Total (N=76)	
Age	41.8	40.0	41.7	40.1	40.9	n.s
Number of Children	2.3	1.9	1.8	1.9	2.0	n.s
Education*	40.7	53.8	58.3	60.0	50.7	n.s
Monthly Income	1,540	1,793	1,840	2,005	1,750	n.s
Living Expenses**	92.9	65.4	66.7	60.0	75.0	n.s
Traditional Value (1-5)	3.3	3.3	3.5	3.2	3.3	n.s

\*: percentage of the college-graduates

\*\* : percentage of married children who pay 100 percent of living expenses for the family

ly-benefited type' showed the highest health score. This result indicates that health is very important for the elderly in interacting with their children in active ways.

Third, mothers-in-law in the 'daughter-in-law-benefited type' had less traditional values ( $M=2.9$ ), as compared to those in the 'mother-in-law-benefited type' ( $M=2.3$ ). In other words, the less traditional values the mothers-in-law have, the more benefits the daughters-in-law are likely to receive.

When the socio-demographic characteristics of the daughters-in-law are compared by type, no significant difference is found. This result is presented in Table 3. Several explanations are possible for such results. First, subgroups of the elderly were more heterogeneous than those of the younger generation. Therefore, this tendency might cause significant differences by the types only for the mothers-in-law. Second, the characteristics of mothers-in-law are more important than those of daughters-in-law in give-and-take relationships between the two generations. For example, mothers-in-law especially need children's aids more desperately when they are not in good health.

### 3) Intergenerational Differences in the Level of Satisfaction

The frequency and mean score of satisfaction for mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are presented in Table 4. Mothers-in-law, in general, were more satisfied with co-residence than daughters-in-law. The difference between the generations is statistically significant. It was expected that the levels of satisfaction with co-residence for each generation would also differ by type. As presented in Table 5, the satisfaction score of mother-in-law was the highest in the 'mother-in-law-benefited type', while daughter-in-law's satisfaction score was the lowest. For mothers-in-law in the 'both-lowly-

**TABLE 4.** THE LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH CO-RESIDENCE BETWEEN GENERATIONS

Level of Satisfaction	Mothers-in-Law	Daughters-in-Law
Very Dissatisfied	1.1%	3.2%
Slightly Dissatisfied	7.4%	24.5%
About Average	17.0%	31.9%
Somewhat Satisfied	29.8%	25.5%
Very Satisfied	44.7%	11.7%
(no answer)		(3.2%)
mean	4.10	3.19
standard deviation	1.01	1.05
t	6.07	(p<.001)

**TABLE 5.** THE LEVEL OF SATISFACTION WITH CO-RESIDENCE BETWEEN GENERATIONS BY THE TYPES

Types	N	sum of benefit score differences	(A)	(B)	(A)-(B)
			satisfaction score of mother-in-law	satisfaction score of daughter-in-law	
Mother-in-law benefited type	28	-14.2	4.43	2.92	1.51
Both-lowly- benefited type	26	-3.2	3.77	2.96	.81
Both-highly- benefited type	12	-1.7	4.42	4.00	.42
Daughter-in-law benefited-type	10	7.2	4.20	4.30	-.10
mean		-5.6	4.17	3.29	.88
standard deviation			.99	1.03	
			p <.1	p <.001	

benefited-type', their satisfaction score is the lowest, but daughters-in-law in this type reported almost the same level of satisfaction as those in the 'mother-in-law-benefited type'. However, both mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law who belong to 'both-highly-benefited type' were quite satisfied with their co-residence. The level of satisfaction of daughters-in-law in the 'daughter-in-law-benefited-type' was higher than their score in any other types. Unlike the expectation, however, mothers-in-law who belong to this type reported a relatively high satisfaction score. The difference in the satisfaction score between the two generations, therefore, was presented as the lowest in this type.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The overall results indicate that mothers-in-law tend to perceive more benefits from co-residence with their children and report a higher level of satisfaction than daughters-in-law. This tendency is mainly due to the fact that parents receive more emotional, financial, and instrumental services from their offspring when they live together. As mentioned above, a majority of elderly respondents in this study are dependent upon their children for financial support. This result might be caused by the differences of perception between the two generations. Considering the recent increase in adult children's establishment of households separate from their parents, those parents are likely to perceive benefits based solely on the fact that they are living with their married children. On the other hand, the son and his spouse are more likely to perceive the co-residence as a cost.

Results of analysis by type of exchange shows that there are significant differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of mothers-in-law based on the type to which they belong. These differences demonstrate that we should not continue to treat the elderly as a homogeneous group. Second, the levels of satisfaction with co-residence of daughters-in-law are varied by type. Daughters-in-law in the 'mother-in-law-benefited type' seemed to receive the least benefits from the co-residence.

The finding that the levels of satisfaction with co-residence for both generations are different by type has many implications. First, as expected, daughters-in-law in the 'mother-in-law-benefited type' and the 'both-lowly-benefited type' reported low satisfaction. On the other hand, daughters-in-law in the 'both-highly-benefited type' and the 'daughter-in-law-benefited type' reported higher satisfaction than the former. However, mothers-in-law in the 'daughter-in-law-benefited type', did not support the hypothesis of this study. The fact that mothers-in-law in the 'daughter-in-law-benefited type' reported higher satisfaction than those in the 'both-lowly-benefited type' implies the parents' high satisfaction even when they give aid to their children. This is because the mothers-in-law actually receive quite a lot of benefits regardless of the types. Another explanation is based on the fact that more daughters-in-law in this type are currently employed than those in the other types.

Furthermore, both generations in the 'both-highly-benefited type' and 'daughter-in-law-benefited type' showed higher satisfaction and a lower generation gap in the level of satisfaction than any other type. This result indicates that the more benefits the young generation perceives and the

more nontraditional ties they have with the older generation, the more both generations are likely to be satisfied with their co-residence.

Such unexpected results demonstrates that parent-children relationships have been changed dramatically in Korean society. It is difficult to expect the continuous application of traditional norms, which require one-directional supply of services only from adult children to elderly parents. The long-term exchange of parent's support for children during the nurturing period and later return from children to their aged parents does not necessarily fit the findings of this study.

Based upon the findings in this study, we can conclude that it is important to consider interrelationships between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in the modern Korean family. It is obvious that the aged parents not only function as 'recipients of support', but as 'providers of support'. We can observe more diverse patterns of parent-children relationships in modern days than in the past. Since newly emerging patterns and traditional patterns co-exist, it is difficult to have a consensus about which pattern is the best for the elderly. Therefore, we need to consider the elderly in different situations.

However, the fact that the 'mother-in-law-benefited type' showed a high degree of satisfaction for their co-residence compared to the other types should be also noticed, since this type shows the most differences in benefit scores between the two generations and the largest intergenerational differences in satisfaction scores. This result seems to reflect the socio-demographic characteristics of mothers-in-law who belong to this type. They are prone to be more aged, widowed, living with the eldest son, in poor health, and devoid of economic power. The generation gap in the perceived benefits is mainly due to the dependent situation of mothers-in-law in this type. The big difference in the satisfaction scores between the two generations, thus, seems to be caused by the level of the daughters-in-law's perceived costs.

In order to reduce the dependency of the elderly on their family and to improve the quality of intergenerational relationships, a number of methods should be explored. Even today, many daughters-in-law are overloaded with the task of care-giving for the elderly in Korea, where welfare policies for the middle-class elderly are almost non-existent. If day-care centers for the elderly were to be operated and such benefits as home medical services, housekeeping, and meal-delivery services are to be provided on a national level, it is very obvious that the dependency of the elderly on their daughters-in-law is likely to decrease [32]. Social service programs, therefore, should be developed in the direction of improving the quality of mutual

relationships between the elderly and their children.

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