



Social exclusion and transportation services: A case study of unskilled migrant workers in South Korea



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ABSTRACT

As a progressive and open society, South Korea recognizes the importance of providing public services that respond to the needs of disadvantaged groups, reflecting principles of social justice and community inclusion. Korea has a growing foreign population, including many low-income migrant workers. This study investigates the transportation demands and problems of these workers, and identifies potential ways to better meet their travel needs. It is based on a survey of 300 randomly-selected Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipinos, Indonesian, and Thai workers living in Ansan, Buchon and Uijungbu industrial districts on the outskirts of the Seoul metropolitan region. The survey investigated respondents' ability to communicate in Korean, their knowledge of transportation services and traffic regulations, and their travel demands. Various transportation problems that these workers often face, and potential policy reforms to address these problems were identified. This study indicates that many new foreign workers could benefit from information resources and education programs on Korean language, transportation services, traffic rules and pedestrian safety. The topic is a relatively unexplored research subject; most previous research on low-income migrant population transport demands and improvement strategies is from European and North America. Some limitations and future research agenda have also been presented.

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Introduction

An important government policy goal is to ensure that public services respond effectively to the needs of all community members, including residents with disabilities, low incomes and members of minority disadvantaged social groups. This is called *social equity*, *social justice* or *community inclusion* (Rawls, 1999). One important way to help accomplish this goal is to ensure that transportation planning responds to disadvantaged people's transportation demands so they have convenient and safe access to basic services and activities such as affordable housing and shopping, education, employment and recreation (FHWA & FTA, 2002; Khisty, 1996; Litman, 2014; Lucas, 2004). This can be challenging since it requires that transportation professionals obtain information about the transportation demands and problems faced by people who are transient, have no permanent address, have limited

ability to speak and write in the region's primary language, and distrust public officials.

The Republic of Korea's growing population of foreign residents includes many low-wage migrant workers. This reflects Korea's growing productivity, education levels and prosperity, which has led to shortages of domestic low-income laborers, so these jobs that are increasingly filled by foreign workers—a pattern that is common in many industrialized countries. As a progressive and open society, Korea is making efforts to increasingly accept foreigners as community members who deserve responsive public services (MOJ, 2012).

This article describes one the first efforts to investigate the travel demands and transportation barriers of unskilled foreign laborers, and potential ways to improve transportation services to support their integration into Korean society. This involved a survey of 300 randomly-selected Chinese (including Korean-Chinese), Vietnamese, Filipino, Indonesian and Thai laborers living in Ansan, Buchon and Uijungbu industrial districts. This study should be of interest to transportation professionals who are working to understand economically and socially disadvantaged groups transportation problems and potential ways to address those problems.

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Literature review

“Social equity,” “social justice” and “social inclusion” all refer to the degree that disadvantaged people (people who are poor, physical or mentally disabled, or are members of oppressed social groups) have economic and social opportunities which allow them to fully participate in society (Preston, 2009). Transportation policies and planning decisions can have significant, but sometimes overlooked, impacts on social inclusion; such decisions affect disadvantaged people's ability to access activities and services (including jobs, education, shopping, healthcare and recreational activities), and the costs (including money, time, discomfort and risk) of travel. Many studies which investigated disadvantaged people's transportation demands and problems, but most have been performed in developed countries (Dodson, Burke, Evans, & Sipe, 2011; Forkenbrock & Sheeley, 2004).

For example, the British government recognizes that inadequate mobility for underprivileged groups can limit their access to education, employment, healthcare, shopping, leisure, and other well-being issues, and has a significant impact on social inclusion and immigrant adaptation (SEU, 2003). Government and advocacy groups have identified various policies and programs that can allow the transportation system to better respond to disadvantaged group's mobility demands and help support social inclusion (CBT, 2012).

Similarly, Norway has about 265,000 foreign-born residents, representing 6% of the total population, 72% of whom are non-European origins. One study surveyed 300 non-Europeans by mail and interviewed 125 migrants who have lived in Norway for less than five years (Uteng, 2007). The results indicate significant differences in the travel patterns of recent non-European immigrants and other residents, and evidence of social exclusion. In response to such research the Norwegian government introduced policies to promote social inclusion in the transportation sector by regulating public transportation fares and providing public transportation service like a dial-a-bus transportation service for marginalized groups.

In the United States these issues are often called “environmental justice” (Forkenbrock & Sheeley, 2004) or “transportation equity” (Altschuler, 2013). Some U.S. studies have investigated the travel patterns of lower-income (Agrawal, Blumenberg, Abel, Pierce, & Darrah, 2011; Blumenberg & Pierce, 2012) and immigrant populations (Tal & Handy, 2010). In one study, standard travel surveys will oversample immigrant households in order to better understand their travel demands (MTI). Others U.S. studies have developed models for evaluating how particular transportation and land use planning decisions affect various demographic groups, including low-income and minority households (Rodier, Abraham, Dix, & Hunt, 2010). This research indicates that disadvantaged people have diverse transportation demands: in the U.S., most people travel primarily by automobile and so benefit from low-priced fuel and un-tolled roads, but many also travel by walking, cycling, ridesharing and public transportation, and so benefit from improvements to these modes of mobility.

In recent years, an increasing amount of research on disadvantaged people's travel demands has been performed in developing countries. In 2003 the South African Department of Transportation commissioned that country's first *National Household Travel Survey* which sampled more than 50,000 residents, a larger than normal sample size for such a survey in order to ensure credible statistical data for all major demographic and geographic groups concerning both motorized and non-motorized travel (SADOT, 2005). During April and May 2012, researchers completed 2068 travel survey interviews in three Rio de Janeiro *favelas* (informal, low-income slum communities) which provided information on vehicular ownership, non-motorized transport, modal share, vehicle parking,

perception of road safety, plus data on the destination, mode, timing and purpose of 4336 unique trips (Koch, Lindau, & Nassi, 2013). Results of these studies provide possible ways for transportation services to support slum-upgrading programs in the Rio de Janeiro *favelas*.

The Handbook for Socio-economic Impact Assessment (SEIA) of Future Urban Transport (FUT) Projects, designed to provide guidance for planning urban bus systems in Indian cities, provides guidance on methods for collecting and applying quantified travel demand data (Arora & Tiwari, 2007). A major study, the Low-Carbon Mobility in India and the Challenges of Social Inclusion integrated Indian travel survey and consumer expenditure data to understand how people from various income classes travel, the financial burdens of this travel, and possible ways to improve affordable, low polluting mobility options (Mahadevia, Joshi, & Datey, 2013).

There are also examples of special resources to help disadvantaged groups, including new immigrants, to safely use transportation systems. Some government agencies provide brochures, websites and training courses to help new immigrants learn how to use basic public services, including public transportation. For example, *Willkommen in Berlin* (“Welcome to Berlin”) provides information on housing, employment, education, healthcare, family assistance, and transportation services in various languages commonly used by immigrants (Gembus, 2008). Similarly, the Edmonton Newcomers Guide, available in eight languages including Chinese, Hindi, Somali and Vietnamese, provides information on housing, policing, garbage collection, transportation, public transit, education, health, recreation and leisure, libraries and municipal government services for people moving to Edmonton, Canada (City of Edmonton, 2010). Many countries also produce driver's education and cycling guides in multiple languages. For example, the California Driver License Handbook is available in Spanish, Arabic, Armenian, Chinese, Farsi, Korean, Punjabi, Russian, Tagalog and Vietnamese, including audio versions of some languages to accommodate people who cannot read English well (www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/pubs.htm). These examples indicate the efforts that some governments make to accommodate people with special needs.

Statistics on immigrant workers in Korea

According to statistics published by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ, 2011), the number of foreigners living in Korea has grown significantly during the last two decades, as illustrated in Fig. 1. There were about 381,000 foreigners in 1999, but it increased approximately three times, to 1.261 million, in 2010. This represents about 3% of Korea's total population. Foreigners are relatively young: 29% were 20–29 years old and 25% were 30–39 years old.

Nearly half of all foreigners living in Korea work (others are students or married to Koreans). Excluding those in industrial training, a total of 557,941 foreigners work in Korea: 44,320 professionals such as foreign language instructors and professors, and 513,621 low-income, unskilled laborers. Of these, 55% were Korean-Chinese, 10% Vietnamese, 5.4% Filipino, 4.7% Indonesian, and 4.4% Thai. These five nationalities accounted for about 80% of foreigner workers, mostly unskilled.

Migrant travel survey

Survey design

To analyze Korean migrant worker travel demands and identify potential transportation policies to improve social inclusion, a survey was conducted of randomly-selected foreigners from the five major nationalities employed in Korea: Chinese (including Korean-Chinese), Vietnamese, Filipino, Indonesian, and Thai. As

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