



The effect of the social networks of the elderly on housing choice in Korea

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the effects of the social networks of the elderly on their independent living arrangements, residential mobility and housing tenure choice in Korea. Traditions of filial duty are still an important part of the familial social network of the elderly, but the relatively lower face-to-face meeting frequency and higher contact frequency with children by telephone and emails reflects changing family relationships in urbanized and Westernized societies. This study shows that the frequent and active social networks of the elderly could contribute to independent living of the elderly. The frequency of meeting with children results in more frequent moving among the elderly while frequent non-familial social networks make the elderly stay in their neighborhoods. The findings imply that supporting the non-familial social networks of the elderly could contribute to successful aging-in-place by helping the elderly maintain their residences independently in their neighborhoods.

1. Introduction

Korea has been experiencing a very rapid transition from an aging to aged society. The elderly population, defined as people aged 65 years or older, is 6.6 million, and it accounts for 13.2% of the total population of Korea according to the 2015 Census. Both the number and percentage of the elderly more than doubled between 1995 and 2015. Korea will become a super-aged society in 10 years, and the share and number of the elderly are projected to double again by 2030. This rapid onset of an aged society will result in drastic socioeconomic changes. Thus, policy and planning to respond to these changes should be prepared for various sectors of society, including that of housing.

To prepare for an aging society, aging-in-place has come to be considered a cost-effective strategy in terms of public policy for housing and health care for the elderly (Lawler, 2001). Aging-in-place is defined as “the ability to live in one's own home and community safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, income, or the ability level” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). This concept emphasizes “independent living arrangements,” “owning homes,” and “communities through a social network” as the essential elements. Therefore, the unique housing needs and housing choice behaviors of the elderly, and the role of social network, should be well-understood for a successful aging-in-place (Cutchin, 2001; Herbers & Mulder, 2017).

The elderly experience physical, psychological, and socioeconomic changes due to retirement, deterioration in health, and ending parenting responsibilities. These changes bring about housing choice

behaviors among the elderly that are different from those of households in general. For instance, elderly households are less likely to buy new houses, except when they downsize their houses due to limitations of income and wealth (Banks, Blundell, Oldfield, & Smith, 2010). The elderly need to decide their living arrangements considering their financial ability and health. Adequate economic resources and homeownership could result in independent living of the elderly (Choi, Choi, & Kim, 2007; DaVanzo & Chan, 1994; Li & Chen, 2011; Martin, 1989).

As mentioned above, a growing body of literature is addressing the housing choices of the elderly, but not much is known about the connections between social network of the elderly and their housing choices. Studies of the social networks of the elderly have focused on their impacts on health and well-being, rather than that of their housing choices. For example, good social relationships can contribute to greater well-being, higher life satisfaction, and better health (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010; Larson, 1978). Interaction with families, friends, and neighbors and their support is positively related to physical and psychological activity and improved quality of life among the elderly (Rafnsson, Shankar, & Steptoe, 2015; Wenger, 1989).

However, the social networks of the elderly could be a key factor affecting their housing choices (Kim, Woosnam, Marcouiller, Aleshinloye, & Choi, 2015). For instance, a strong social network of the elderly means a higher potential to secure social support from families, friends, and neighbors, which makes the elderly more likely to live independently (Li & Shin, 2013; Sergeant & Ekerdt, 2008). Elderly households are less likely to move if they have a good social tie in their

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communities so that they can continue to enjoy a quality social network (Boldy, Grenade, Lewin, Karol, & Burton, 2011; Hwang, 2008; Kim, 2012). Additionally, the elderly with good social networks may choose to become homeowners or maintain homeownership, thanks to obtaining support from their families and expecting deeper interactions with their adult children and grandchildren (Darab, Hartman, & Holdsworth, 2017; Lee & Painter, 2014; Painter & Lee, 2009). When the elderly live with their adult children or live close to their children, they could expect to gain a better support for home maintenance and healthcare from the adult children, which will make them more likely to keep their homeownership (Feinstein & McFadden, 1989; Venti & Wise, 1990; Painter & Lee, 2009; Lee & Painter, 2014; van der Pers, Mulder, & Steverink, 2015). The elderly owning a home live independent lives for a longer time, and this independence, combined with a better social network, can contribute to “aging-in-place.”

Despite the important role of the elderly's social network in their housing choices, systematic and comprehensive theories have not been well established. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the development of related theories by analyzing the effects of the social networks of the elderly on housing choice behaviors. Specifically, four research questions are addressed.

- (1) How do the social networks of the elderly affect living arrangements?
- (2) What are the effects of the social networks of the elderly on their residential mobility?
- (3) Do the social networks of the elderly affect their housing choice?
- (4) Are there any differences between the effect of familial and non-familial social networks of the elderly on their housing choices?

To answer these research questions about the relationship between the social network of the elderly and their housing choices, this study analyzes the Korea Longitudinal Study of Aging, using regression models. In the next section, the literature on housing choice and social networks of the elderly is reviewed. Methodological approaches, including data collection, operationalization of social networks, and regression models, are described, and the results and findings follow. Finally, the implications and contributions of this study are presented with some recommendations for public policy and future study.

2. Literature review

Housing choice depends on the household lifecycle in which each household has different housing needs (Clark & Onaka, 1983; Kendig, 1984). For instance, young adult households without children often prefer to reside in urban neighborhoods having higher accessibility to jobs and urban activities, and they tend to be renters, reflecting higher residential mobility (Quigley & Weinberg, 1977). By contrast, family households with children are more likely to be homeowners and prefer to live in suburban neighborhoods with good quality schools to provide a better neighborhood environment for their children (Mohanty & Raut, 2009; Rohe, Van Zandt, & McCarthy, 2001). Elderly households may have a lower preference for good school districts than conventional family households with children (Morrow-Jones & Kim, 2009). As a household's income grows, the household tends to move to find better accommodation through a housing filtering process (Baer & Williamson, 1988; Kim, Chung, & Blanco, 2013; Little, 1976). While prime-aged households, who are 50–64 years old, tend to expand their houses and be homeowners, elderly households are more likely to be renters and downsize their households (Angelini, Brugiavini, & Weber, 2014).

The elderly are confronted with a decline in household income after retirement, and their health conditions deteriorate over time. Their children are grown and have moved away. Elderly households are more likely to be single-person households due to the death of a spouse. All of these physical, psychological, and socioeconomic changes result in

unique housing choices for the elderly. The age of the elderly households was also positively related to the likelihood of transition from home owning to renting (Abramsson & Andersson, 2016; Herbers, Mulder, & Modenes, 2014; Tatsiramos, 2006). This pattern was found in 15 of 17 OECD countries (Chiuri & Jappelli, 2010). Painter and Lee (2009) argued that health status is a more important factor in the determination of the housing tenure choice of the elderly than that of age. They showed that poor physical health in the elderly households promoted the transition from home owning to renting by analyzing the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) data from the United States. Ko and Choi (2012) found that, among the elderly, having poor health status and living alone are positively related to lower homeownership and higher consumption of small houses in Korea.

The housing choices of the elderly are affected by their social network that is defined as the relationship with families, friends, and neighbors (Fiori, Antonucci, & Cortina, 2006, pp. P25–P32; Mitchell, 1969). Houses and neighborhoods where the elderly live are the sites of their lifelong social relationships. The experience of living with their family members and the emotional ties that they make with their family members, friends, and neighbors render these places meaningful for the elderly, which results in a stronger place attachment of the elderly (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Further, Cutchin (2001) suggested that life experience in place, including social and community relationship, is an important contributor to the migration of the elderly. Based on the theoretical framework of place attachment, a better social network of the elderly could strengthen the place attachment and make the elderly keep their residence in the place.

While systematic theories of the connections between social networks and the housing choices of the elderly remain underdeveloped, researchers have provided empirical evidences on the connections. For instance, the relationship with family members plays a key role in the residential mobility of seniors (Sergeant & Ekerdt, 2008). Geographical proximity to children can increase the frequency of interacting with children, making them gain a better support from their children (van der Pers et al., 2015). Elderly households tend to move near their children's homes to get support (Pettersson & Malmberg, 2009; Silverstein & Angelelli, 1998). The elderly households, living close to their children, are less likely to experience the transition from home owning to renting, implying that better relationships with their children produce higher residential stability for seniors (Lee & Painter, 2014; Painter & Lee, 2009).

The social activities of the elderly and their relationships with neighbors and friends are also important determinants for the housing choice of the elderly. According to Boldy et al. (2011), about 60% of the elderly households selected “good neighbors” as a very important factor in the decision to keep their residence in Western Australia. Kim (2012) showed that the frequency of attending community groups is negatively related to the residential mobility of the elderly in Korea. Hwang (2008) analyzed the residential preference of the elderly among Chinese and Korean immigrants in Canada. She showed that Korean seniors consider church activities to be the main factor in keeping their residence; however, Chinese seniors tend to keep their residence when they are living close to their children.

Researchers have explored senior housing issues in the Asian context, but many of these studies focused on the living arrangements of the elderly rather than addressing the role of the social networks of the elderly and their connection to housing choices (Chiu & Ho, 2006; Kim, 2015; Li & Chen, 2011; Li & Shin, 2013; Martin, 1989; Zhan, Feng, & Luo, 2008). Some empirical studies have addressed the housing choice of seniors with an emphasis on social networks, but most of them have been conducted in the context of Western developed countries. Asian countries, including Korea, have a different social and cultural context as that of Confucian culture, from those of Western countries, especially with regard to supporting seniors (Li & Shin, 2013; Zhan et al., 2008). Filial duty is traditionally considered one of the most important social

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