

# Intergenerational Family Relationships of the Elderly in Korea

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## Abstract

*This study is an overview of the patterns and changes of intergenerational relations among the elderly in Korea and a discussion of its implications in the context of rapid social transformation. The theme, in the face of accelerated population aging and the continuation of the family as a main support system, has drawn the attention of researchers and policy-makers. Many have expressed concerns about the diminishing willingness and/or capacity of young family members to support their elderly ones and thus its detrimental consequences for the latter. Underlying such concern is the view that the elderly are at the receiving end of support and are passive participants in their relationship with other family members. As an ample amount of research has reported, however, many elderly members still play important roles and contribute to their families. This study, standing on the belief that intergenerational relations are varied among the elderly and dynamic over their life course, approaches some key aspects including geographic proximity, contacts and visits, exchanges of support, and attitudes toward the traditional familial role of elderly support. This study touches upon and synthesizes previous findings to draw a comprehensive picture of family relations between generations. In doing so, it focuses on sociodemographic differentials to reveal the heterogeneity of the elderly and their relationship with younger family members.*

**Keywords:** family in old age, coresidence, geographic proximity, intergenerational contact, support exchange, attitudes toward old age support, aging society and family

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## Introduction

Families in Korea today still serve as the foundation for everyday life and individual activity, and function as the basic unit of society. At the same time, though, they have also been undergoing tremendous changes in their structures, patterns, and relationships among the members (Ahn 1997; Kim D. et al. 2001; Kim S. et al. 2000; Kwon and Kim 2006; Kwon and Park 1995). Indeed, Korean society is witnessing an increasing number of atypical family structures and behaviors, including late marriage, divorce, single parent families, households that are missing a generation, and elderly people living alone.

The rapidity and direction of changes in the family have become an urgent and serious challenge to Korean society, drawing much attention from academics and the public (An and Kim 2000; Chang 2000; Jeon 2000). It has invigorated the debate about whether the family is in decline. Some interpret these changes as representing family disintegration and a crisis with negative consequences for individuals and societies. Based on this, they argue that the family needs to be restored to its proper function. Others view the observed changes in the family as an indication of the diversification of the family. They suggest that the definition of the family is merely changing rather than declining and thus social effort should be made to accept and help alternative types of families (Kim D. et al. 2005).

The debate on family decline, in the face of accelerated population aging, is extended to family relationships between adult children and their elderly parents (Kim D. et al. 2005; Kim C. 2007b). When the family decline view attends to intergenerational relations, it emphasizes the weakening ties or isolation between generations. In Korea, where support for the elderly has been mainly provided by the family in both a normative and practical sense while social programs are still under development, the loss of family care has a detrimental impact on the well-being of the elderly (Kim I. et al. 1996).

Recent demographic changes lend legitimate ground to the proponents of the family decline view: fewer children and prolonged life.

The elderly today live longer than in the past but have fewer children who can provide aid as they age and tend to need more assistance. Parallel to this demographic trend, the increase in female participation in the labor force is considered an obstacle to elderly care by the family. Given the gendered roles and norms in Korea, the task of caring for family members who are sick or old and frail has been primarily taken by women, especially daughters-in-law. Increasing numbers of married women working outside the home further limits the propensity for provision of family care for the elderly members (Kim C. 2001, 2004).

The “problem” view, dominant in contemporary social discourse in Korea, directs our focus to the negative aspects of changes in the family along with population aging. To be sure, modernization as well as demographic trends affect intergenerational family relationships. When dramatic societal changes are occurring as in Korea, termed “compressive modernization” by Chang Kyung-Sup (2000), the society in question commonly experiences both family dissolution and the emergence of new family types. Furthermore, the changes in the family are not uniformly in the direction of weakening or dissolving ties between generations. Recent studies have revealed that, despite the increase of independent living among the elderly, the elderly parents are not isolated from their adult children (Kim C. and Rhee 1997, 1999a, 2000; Kim I. and Kim C. 2003). Even when separated by geographic distances, they frequently interact and exchange assistance.

The present paper acknowledges the complexity and diversity of family relationships in old age. The relations between adult child and their elderly parents are dynamic and take different forms depending on the status of each party’s needs, resources, and degree of attachment. Some types of interaction emerge only when needs arise (i.e. daily living assistance for impaired elderly parents). The intergenerational relationship conveys feelings of ambivalence and conflict, mostly reflected during periods of transition (Kim C. and Rhee 1999a). The elderly population has become more heterogeneous as the baby boomer generation has started to join them (Kim I. et al.

1996; Kim D. and Kim C. 2004). These factors make it difficult to fully capture the scope of intergenerational family relationships, particularly in a short paper.

This paper thus offers a brief overview of key aspects of intergenerational family relationships in contemporary Korea. These include multigenerational family households, contacts and support exchanges between generations, and expectations of old age support. Relying on previous studies and social reports, the paper examines whether and how they have been changing over the last two decades. The above aspects of intergenerational family relationships are, of course, closely related among themselves. One can be a cause or condition for another, and vice versa. To grasp a more comprehensive picture and gain better knowledge of intergenerational family relationships, it would still be necessary to simultaneously approach the different domains of these relationships. The paper also discusses such variables as gender and age among the elderly. This is also necessary to understand how the elderly differ in their relationships with adult children according to these variables.

### **Living Arrangements of the Elderly and Contact with Adult Children**

For elderly persons, the question of whether they live with their children has been an important issue in Korea, where family members have provided support for elderly members and non-familial care services are limited. Such family support typically involves coresidence of elderly parents with at least one of their adult children (Kim C. and Rhee 1997, 2000; Kwon and Park 1996; Kim C. 2005b). Obviously separate residences do not preclude family support across household boundaries, just as living together does not guarantee provision of care for the elderly. Nonetheless, because of their more limited economic activity and need for routine assistance with daily activities as their health declines, coresidence takes on special importance for the elderly. For these reasons, the living arrangements of the elderly

has been a central focus for those who are concerned with research or administration in areas related to the problems of the elderly in Korea (Kim C. 2005b, 2007b; Kim C. and Rhee 1997, 1999a, 2000; Won 1995).

As shown in Table 1, an increasing proportion of the elderly are living apart from their children. In Korea today, there are as many elderly people living apart from their children as there are those living with their children. In 1980, 19.5% of persons aged 65 and over lived away from their children. Within two decades, this proportion more than doubled to 50.9%. Correspondingly, the proportion of the elderly who lived with a married child dropped sharply from 61.7% in 1980 to 35.7% in 2000. The proportion living with an unmarried child declined at a slower rate than the proportion living with a married child (from 18.8% in 1980 to 13.4% in 2000). This trend implies that married children are more likely to have separate households, compared to unmarried children who tend to remain in their parental homes.

Though the increase in separate residences between generations is observed across sex, marital status and place of residence, the rates of increase and its implications vary according to these characteristics. It should be noted that there is a strong correlation among sex, marital status, and age. Elderly women tend to live longer than elderly men, due to the sex differentials in life expectancy. The difference in longevity between men and women, coupled with marriage behaviors, leads to a higher incidence of widowhood among elderly women than among elderly men. Husbands tend to be older than wives, thus leaving wives widowed after their death. Also, remarriage is more frequent among men than among women. The close relationship among sex, marital status, and age among the elderly require special caution in interpreting the patterns of living arrangements based on these variables.

More so than elderly men, the proportion of elderly women living apart from their children was consistently greater over the last two decades. Further examination of this proportion reveals an interesting pattern: while the proportion living alone has been greater

Table 1. Living Arrangements of the Elderly Aged 65 +  
by Sex, Marital Status and Place of Residence, 1980-2000

(Unit: %)

|                                | Total  | Male   | Female | Unmarried | Married | Urban  | Rural  |
|--------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|-----------|---------|--------|--------|
| <b>1980</b>                    |        |        |        |           |         |        |        |
| Living apart from child*       | 19.5   | 22.8   | 17.6   | 13.1      | 27.3    | 15.2   | 22.2   |
| In one-person household        | (4.8)  | (1.5)  | (6.8)  | (8.1)     | (0.9)   | (3.3)  | (5.8)  |
| In couple-only household       | (10.1) | (18.0) | (5.4)  | ----      | (22.0)  | (6.5)  | (12.3) |
| Living with married child**    | 61.7   | 48.2   | 69.6   | 74.3      | 46.3    | 63.5   | 60.5   |
| Living with unmarried child*** | 18.8   | 29.0   | 12.8   | 12.6      | 26.3    | 21.3   | 17.3   |
| Sum                            | 100.0  | 100.0  | 100.0  | 100.0     | 100.0   | 100.0  | 100.0  |
| <b>1990</b>                    |        |        |        |           |         |        |        |
| Living apart from child        | 31.8   | 38.4   | 27.9   | 22.5      | 41.9    | 24.2   | 40.5   |
| In one-person household        | (9.5)  | (3.5)  | (13.1) | (17.3)    | (1.1)   | (7.0)  | (12.4) |
| In couple-only household       | (17.5) | (30.9) | (9.6)  | ----      | (36.5)  | (12.3) | (23.6) |
| Living with married child      | 51.5   | 38.5   | 59.2   | 65.0      | 36.8    | 56.7   | 45.6   |
| Living with unmarried child    | 16.7   | 23.1   | 12.9   | 12.5      | 21.3    | 19.1   | 13.9   |
| Sum                            | 100.0  | 100.0  | 100.0  | 100.0     | 100.0   | 100.0  | 100.0  |
| <b>2000</b>                    |        |        |        |           |         |        |        |
| Living apart from child        | 50.9   | 58.1   | 46.6   | 39.0      | 61.9    | 42.5   | 62.6   |
| In one-person household        | (16.8) | (5.9)  | (23.5) | (33.7)    | (1.4)   | (13.8) | (21.0) |
| In couple-only household       | (29.2) | (47.5) | (18.0) | ----      | (55.8)  | (23.5) | (37.1) |
| Living with married child      | 35.7   | 24.3   | 42.7   | 50.6      | 22.0    | 41.0   | 28.3   |
| Living with unmarried child    | 13.4   | 17.6   | 10.8   | 10.4      | 16.1    | 16.5   | 9.1    |
| Sum                            | 100.0  | 100.0  | 100.0  | 100.0     | 100.0   | 100.0  | 100.0  |

Notes: \* The elderly live alone, live with spouse only, or live with relatives or non-relatives. All but a small proportion of the elderly do not have children in Korea.

\*\*The elderly live with at least one married child with or without unmarried child.

\*\*\* The elderly live with at least one unmarried child without married child.

Source: 10% Sample Raw Data of Population and Housing Census in each year. Cited from Kim C. (2004).

among elderly women than among elderly men, the proportion living with just a spouse has been smaller. Thus, among the elderly who live apart from their children, elderly women are less likely than elderly men to live alone but more likely to live with their spouses. This suggests that, considering the importance of having a spouse in old age, elderly women living apart from their children may face more adverse circumstances than their counterparts among elderly men. By the same token, the proportion living with married children is consistently greater among elderly women than among elderly men, though the proportion has declined for both groups. This pattern may reflect the lower status of elderly women. Despite the enhancement in their social and family status in recent years, women in Korea still largely occupy a lower position in terms of education, economic activities, and power within the family. Elderly women have typically been underprivileged position over the course of their lives and lack the resources required for independent living (Kim C. 2001). Thus, they are more likely than elderly men to have to live with and depend on their children.

The patterns of living arrangements are also distinguished by the presence of a spouse. Throughout the years considered here, the proportion living apart from children has been substantially greater among those currently married than among those currently unmarried. It suggests that the presence of a spouse is an important factor for independent living. Adult children, upon or after the marriage of their children, are more likely to leave their parental home when both parents are alive. Leaving widowed elderly parents on their own may cause psychological stress for the children, given the strong traditional norm of filial piety. Also, when elderly parents become widowed, they are likely to join their children's family.

As with sex and marital status, place of residence is a distinctive variable. The proportion living apart from their children has been greater among the elderly in rural areas than the elderly in urban areas in the last two decades. This reflects the out-migration of young adults for reasons of employment and their own children's education, resulting in elderly family members being left behind in rural areas.

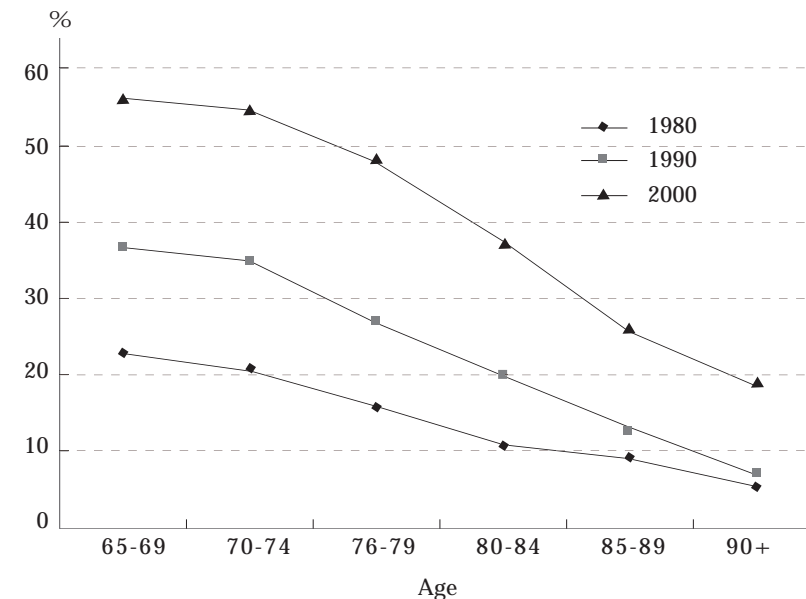
In the meantime, the number of people living apart from their children in cities is increasingly as quickly as in rural areas. This suggests that, while both elderly parents and their children may live geographically close, they tend to live separately.

The pattern of living arrangements by age of the elderly is presented in Figure 1. It clearly shows that the proportion living apart from children has increased at all ages between 1980 and 2000, with a huge increase seen in younger groups of the elderly. This suggests that independent living may emerge as a new type of living arrangement in old age for recent cohorts and does not necessarily indicate a shortage of resources. Furthermore, the tendency to live apart from children becomes weaker with the age of the elderly. As they get older and frailer, the elderly eventually live with their children. The transition from separate residence to coresidence also occurs with the loss of a spouse. Nonetheless, the proportion among the oldest old living apart from their children has increased over time and continues at a substantial level. This provides sufficient ground to argue that elderly parents are increasingly being abandoned by their adult children and require more attention in terms of social services as they are unable to live independently.

As discussed above, an increasing number of elderly parents live apart from their children over the last decades. Given the fact that more people have living elderly parents due to the prolongation of life, thus producing a more favorable situation for multigenerational coresidence, the increase in elderly parents living apart from children appears more astonishing. This trend has been frequently attributed to the modernization process involving attitudinal and behavioral changes among the young generations who prefer to live in nuclear families (i.e. leaving the parental home upon marriage) and their migration in search of better educational and economic opportunities. Many proponents of the family decline view take it as indication of the loss of the traditional function of family care, emphasizing the decline in the willingness or ability of adult children.

With the process, or as a result, of migration to urban areas and mandatory geographic mobility on the part of the younger genera-

Figure 1. The Proportion of Elderly Living Apart from Children by Age Group in 1980, 1990, and 2000



Source: 10% Sample Raw Data of Population and Housing Census in each year. Cited from Kim C. (2004).

tion, many adult children find it difficult to live with their elderly parents. Also, there are cases in which the elderly parents are abandoned and left alone, as is often reported in the mass media. Nonetheless, the reality is too complicated to lend full credit to the family decline theory. Contrary to the common belief that elderly parents want to live with their children under the same roof, many elderly also want or prefer to live independently. Nationwide surveys on the elderly in the mid-1990s and 2000s report that almost half of the elderly aged 65 and over say that they want to live independently but close to their children (Jeong et al. 2004; Rhee et al. 1994). Studies of living arrangements among the elderly revealed that the preference for separate residence is particularly strong among

the younger elderly: those who value their privacy and have the resources required to maintain an independent residence (i.e. living spouse, fair health, and financial security). In addition, the elderly are as aware as their adult children are of the tensions and conflicts involving multigenerational coresidence, particularly the friction between mother and daughter-in-law (Kim C. and Rhee 2000).

The patterns of living arrangement by marital status and age also cast doubts on whether intergenerational family relationships are in decline. As shown above, coresidence is more common among those with spouses than among those who are widowed and becomes more frequent with the age of the elderly. The living arrangement of the elderly should be understood as a dynamic process rather than as a fixed state. Many elderly parents, who live independently, may come to live with their children when they lose their spouse or as their health declines with age. Despite the impression that the cross-sectional approach leads us to (i.e. many elderly live apart from their children until death), the majority of elderly parents seem to eventually live with their children when the time comes (Kim C. and Rhee 2000; Kim C. 2005b).

### Contact and Support between Generations

It is obvious that interactions between generations can occur across household boundaries. If intergenerational family relationships weaken or erode as in the family decline view, the frequency and amount of interactions between elderly parents and their adult children who live separately should fall. However, this is not supported by the observed trend. The frequency of visits between elderly parents and their children in separate residences has actually increased over the last decade. According to Kim D. et al (2005), in 1994, 56.8% of the elderly living alone and 58.6% of the elderly living with spouses saw their children more than once a month. In a decade, the corresponding proportions increased to 64.3% and 81.5%, respectively. During the same period, phone contact, which is not affected by geographic

distance, grew more frequent and was sustained at a high level. In 2004, more than 90% of the elderly living alone or with spouses talked with their children living in different residences at least once a month. This observation suggests that while the elderly are increasingly living apart from their children, they still live close to their children if they can and maintain frequent visits and phone contact with them.

Research interest in the interaction between generations is focused on the content and direction of support between them. As in many other parts of Asia, studies of intergenerational support in old age in Korea are heavily focused on the support received by elderly parents. The fact that elderly parents, even at advanced ages, are also providers of various types of support to their children is often overlooked (Kim I. and Kim C. 2003). In fact, many elderly parents still provide a great deal of support to their adult children with routine tasks (i.e. child care). Furthermore, the elderly parents perceive the role of support provider as a continuation of their parental responsibilities (Kim C. and Rhee 1999). Elderly parents can also serve as a safety net for their adult children in times of need (Kim C. 2005c).

Table 2 presents the proportion of elderly people who receive and provide financial, instrumental, and emotional assistance. However, the table should be read with caution. First, the discrepancy in measurements in different surveys can make comparison across time difficult. However, the figures are considered to be sufficient to yield general trends over the last decade. Second, the support in the table is not necessarily meant to be from or to children. The main provider or receiver of support can be not only children but also others including a spouse or grandchildren. Third, the readers should remember that the provision of support from one party can occur when the other party needs help. For instance, instrumental support from children may be provided if and when the elderly parents need their assistance. The figures in the table indicate the current status of support giving and receiving regardless of the needs of involving parties. As shown in Table 2, the elderly are more likely to receive rather than provide help across different domains of support. The imbalance

Table 2. Proportion of the Elderly Aged 65+ Giving and Receiving Help in 1994 and 2004

(Unit: %)

|                             | All   | Men   | U-M  | M-M   | Women | U-W   | M-W  |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| Year of 1994                |       |       |      |       |       |       |      |
| Cases (persons)             | 1,238 | 486   | 77   | 409   | 752   | 551   | 201  |
| Receiving financial help    | 61.7  | 48.6  | 74.4 | 43.5  | 70.4  | 77.1  | 51.5 |
| Giving financial help       | 19.7  | 27.5  | 14.3 | 29.9  | 14.6  | 12.7  | 20.5 |
| Receiving help in ADL       | 14.8  | 8.8   | 9.0  | 8.8   | 18.7  | 21.4  | 11.0 |
| Receiving help in IADL      | 32.1  | 16.3  | 22.1 | 15.2  | 42.3  | 47.4  | 28.4 |
| Giving instrumental help    | 6.9   | 7.0   | 1.3  | 8.1   | 6.8   | 3.8   | 15.0 |
| Receiving emotional support | 74.2  | 77.4  | 53.8 | 81.9  | 72.0  | 67.9  | 83.5 |
| Giving emotional support    | 54.1  | 64.9  | 33.8 | 70.8  | 47.1  | 40.7  | 65.0 |
| Year of 2004                |       |       |      |       |       |       |      |
| Cases (persons)             | 3,134 | 1,222 | 132  | 1,090 | 1,911 | 1,232 | 680  |
| Receiving financial help    | 79.6  | 72.2  | 74.2 | 71.9  | 84.3  | 85.5  | 82.2 |
| Giving financial help       | 22.0  | 26.8  | 20.5 | 27.5  | 18.9  | 18.8  | 19.1 |
| Receiving instrumental help | 25.0  | 22.4  | 23.5 | 22.3  | 26.6  | 27.9  | 24.3 |
| Giving instrumental help    | 11.6  | 12.2  | 4.5  | 13.1  | 11.1  | 4.5   | 23.1 |
| Receiving emotional support | 76.3  | 77.9  | 54.5 | 80.7  | 75.2  | 70.0  | 84.5 |
| Giving emotional support    | 59.7  | 67.1  | 34.1 | 71.2  | 54.9  | 45.5  | 72.1 |

Note: U-M refers to Unmarried Men; M-M, Married Men; U-W, Unmarried Women; and M-W, Married Women.

Source: 1994 Korean Elderly Survey and 2004 Korean Elderly Survey conducted by the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs. Cited from Kim C. (2007b).

between giving and receiving is distinctive particularly in the domain of material support involving financial or instrumental aid. This reflects the drop in resources in old age. With age, the health of the elderly parent declines and their economic resources become more constrained. Despite the comparability problem, there seems to be little evidence that the proportion of elderly receiving assistance from others has declined between 1994 and 2004. The patterns of receiving

and providing support vary according to sex and marital status of the elderly as well as content of support.

In the economic domain, the proportion receiving financial support is greater among elderly women than among elderly men. This gender differential suggests that elderly women are more likely than elderly men to face economic adversity and require more financial support. This is confirmed by the fact that they are less likely to provide financial support to others. In turn, the economic dependency of elderly women can be attributed to their lifelong vulnerability in terms of economic activities and financial security. The imbalance between giving and receiving economic support is wider among unmarried people than married people. This differential by marital status can be partially explained by the fact that married elderly tend to be younger than unmarried elderly.

Instrumental support was measured in different ways in 1994 and 2004. In 1994, the proportion who received aid in activities of daily living (ADL) or instrumental activities of daily living (IADL) is greater among elderly women than elderly men. In 2004, while the sex differentials in receiving instrumental assistance were found to be as wide as in 1994, the corresponding proportion is somewhat higher for elderly women. An interesting pattern is that the proportion giving instrumental support to others is distinctively higher among married elderly women (even than among married elderly men) for both years. This reflects the fact that many elderly women take care of their husbands through various activities including preparing meals.

Compared to financial or instrumental support, emotional support mainly measured by incidence of consulting or keeping company can take place more constantly in the sense that this form of support does not require special needs of each generation. As revealed in Table 2, the proportion giving or receiving emotional support is greater than the corresponding proportion involving other types of support. However, differentials by sex and marital status are also observed. Elderly men are more likely than elderly women to have an exchange of emotional support. This is because men establish wide social networks and play important roles in decision making at home

while women confine their lives to family. In addition, the proportion with emotional support is greater among married elderly than unmarried elderly. This is mainly because daily conversation and consulting is easier between spouses.

Giving and receiving support among the elderly is mainly confined to family members. Table 3 identifies the primary provider of support to the elderly who got assistance from others in 2004. As shown in the table, the financial assistance that the elderly received came from their children, the eldest son in particular. Financial aid from spouses was almost zero since the elderly couples are assumed to have shared their economic resources. The minor proportion indicating spouses as providers may have come from separated couples.

Table 3. Distribution of Primary Providers of Support to the Elderly Aged 65 and Over in 2004

(Unit: %)

|                         | Finance | Nursing Care | Domestics Chores | Counseling |
|-------------------------|---------|--------------|------------------|------------|
| Spouse                  | 0.2     | 36.1         | 48.6             | 46.5       |
| Eldest son/wife         | 53.2    | 28.6         | 23.8             | 20.7       |
| Other son/wife          | 21.2    | 12.0         | 11.3             | 7.1        |
| Eldest daughter/husband | 12.9    | 6.3          | 5.1              | 8.6        |
| Other daughter/husband  | 10.0    | 8.0          | 6.4              | 6.2        |
| Grandchildren/spouse    | 0.9     | 2.4          | 1.6              | 0.5        |
| Parents                 | -       | -            | 0.3              | 0.0        |
| Siblings                | 0.5     | 0.7          | 0.3              | 1.3        |
| Other relatives         | 0.4     | 1.1          | 0.8              | 1.2        |
| Others                  | 1.6     | 4.8          | 1.8              | 7.9        |
| Sum                     | 100.0   | 100.0        | 100.0            | 100.0      |
| Cases (persons)         | (2,559) | (822)        | (2,480)          | (2,493)    |

Note: The total cases refer to the elderly who receive the support of interest.

Source: 2004 Korean Elderly Survey. Cited from Chung et al. (2004)

Other forms of support received by the elderly are either from spouses or children (again the eldest son and his wife in particular). This pattern suggests that, when the elderly parents receive help other than financial, the spouse may be as important a source as the children. The elderly couples seem to meet their needs for themselves at first, but ask their children for help when and if they become unable to do so.

Further examination of the main providers of instrumental or emotional support by sex and marital status of the elderly reveals that more than half of elderly couples receive such help from their spouses (Kim C. 2007b). In addition, there is a substantial difference between married men and married women. The majority of married men who receive instrumental assistance identify their wives as the primary provider. However, among married women, the corresponding proportion identifying their husbands as the primary provider is substantially smaller. A similar pattern of the sex differential among married elderly is also found in the case of emotional support. It suggests that while the elderly couple tends to take care of each other, elderly women provide more assistance to their husbands than elderly men do to their wives. In relation to adult children, the needs of elderly mothers may be more serious than that of elderly fathers. The care of elderly fathers can be directly provided by elderly mothers. However, when the elderly mother becomes frail or ill, they may come to rely on their children rather than their husbands.

The centeredness of spouse and children is also found in those who receive support from the elderly. Table 4 presents the primary receiver of support from the elderly in 2004. The primary receiver of financial aid is concentrated on children, especially the eldest son and his wife, and grandchildren. The high proportion taken up by grandchildren is related to the survey items, which include small amounts of pocket money. Grandparents often give pocket money to their grandchildren. Most instrumental support including nursing care and domestic chores as well as emotional support is provided to spouses and children (particularly the eldest son and his wife). Caring for grandchildren also benefits the grown children, especially



Table 4. Distribution of Primary Receivers of Support to the Elderly Aged 65 and Over in 2004

|                         | (Unit: %) |              |                 |            |                       |
|-------------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------------|
|                         | Finance   | Nursing care | Domestic chores | Counseling | Care of Grandchildren |
| Spouse                  | 1.3       | 74.7         | 60.1            | 54.7       | 1.1                   |
| Eldest son/wife         | 29.6      | 7.7          | 19.1            | 14.0       | 37.2                  |
| Other son/wife          | 11.6      | 0.7          | 9.5             | 5.8        | 32.4                  |
| Eldest daughter/husband | 5.7       | 1.1          | 2.0             | 7.9        | 9.6                   |
| Other daughter/husband  | 3.8       | 2.0          | 4.3             | 5.3        | 12.6                  |
| Grandchildren/spouse    | 42.5      | 1.6          | 2.7             | 0.7        | 5.7                   |
| Parents                 | 2.4       | 9.1          | 1.2             | 0.2        | –                     |
| Siblings                | 1.0       | 0.4          | 0.3             | 1.2        | –                     |
| Other relatives         | 1.6       | 1.0          | 0.6             | 0.9        | 0.8                   |
| Others                  | 0.5       | 1.7          | 0.2             | 9.3        | 0.6                   |
| Sum                     | 100.0     | 100.0        | 100.0           | 100.0      | 100.0                 |
| Cases (persons)         | (712)     | (366)        | (1,696)         | (1,941)    | (597)                 |

Note: The total cases refer to the elderly who provide support.

Source: 2004 Korean Elderly Survey. Cited from Chung et al. (2004).

sons. The proportion that the elderly provide care for their ill parents draws our attention. Parents make up 9% of those who receive nursing from elderly family members. Although this is small compared to that of spouses, it is important in terms of representing the care of elderly parents by older children.

The types of relationships that elderly parents have with their children in terms of flow of support can be categorized into four types: both giving and receiving, only receiving, only giving, and no exchange at all (Kim I. and Kim C. 2003). It should be noted that this rather simplistic typology does not consider the content and amount of support. Table 5 presents the patterns of intergenerational support

Table 5. Patterns of Support Exchange with Children by Living Arrangements and Sex of the Elderly Aged 65+ in 2004

|                       | (Unit: %) |       |       |       |       |       |
|-----------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                       | All       | LA    | LWS   | LWC   | Men   | Women |
| No exchange           | 6.8       | 11.4  | 10.0  | 1.0   | 9.5   | 5.0   |
| Giving Only           | 2.3       | 1.0   | 2.4   | 3.0   | 3.7   | 1.4   |
| Receiving Only        | 37.0      | 48.5  | 48.3  | 19.4  | 42.3  | 33.6  |
| Both Giving/Receiving | 53.9      | 39.1  | 39.3  | 76.6  | 44.5  | 60.0  |
| Sum                   | 100.0     | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Cases (persons)       | 2,786     | 614   | 1,077 | 1,095 | 1,094 | 1,692 |

Note: LA refers to those living alone; LWS, those living with a spouse only; LWC, those living with children.

Source: 2004 Korean Elderly Survey. Cited from Oh et al. (2005).

by living arrangements and sex of the elderly in 2004. A small proportion of the respondents in Table 5 either do not exchange any support with their grown children or only give support without receiving it. Not surprisingly, there is a substantial proportion of the elderly who only receive support from their children. However, more than half of the elderly exchange support with their children.

The patterns by living arrangement show that, among the elderly living alone or with spouses only, the proportion only receiving support is greatest, followed by the proportion both giving and receiving. Among the elderly living with children, the proportion both giving and receiving is by far greater than any other type. This suggests that even the elderly living apart from their children receive support from their children or mutually trade support with them. In addition, the elderly living with their children tend to trade support rather than only receive support from their children. In terms of sex, the proportion involving mutual exchange of support is much greater among elderly women than elderly men. This sex differential seems to be related to the types of support that elderly men and elderly women

can provide. The support elderly men can provide to their children tends to be economic and infrequent. Meanwhile, elderly women can help their children with domestic chores and care for young children. This kind of support can be provided occasionally or on a regular basis, resulting in a higher propensity of mutual exchange for elderly women.

The above reviews the extent and patterns of support exchange among the elderly who currently give or receive support. It does not necessarily show whether and by whom the needs of the elderly for specific types of support are met. As mentioned before, provision of support from one party requires a demand from the other party. Many young elderly people, who are still healthy and able to maintain an independent life, may not need their children's assistance for routine daily activities or living expenses. For this reason, it is worth looking into how the elderly will react to the circumstances that are likely to occur in the future. According to Chung et al. (2004), when the elderly are asked whom they will contact in the case of an emergency, many pointed to their children as the primary contact person. In particular, when they confront urgent financial problems, the majority express their intension to ask for help from their children. Along with the current status of support exchange patterns, this reflects the centeredness of family in elderly care.

### Attitudes toward Old Age Support

This section examines the attitudes of the elderly toward old age support. It first reviews whether and how the attitudes concerning living arrangements in old age have changed, since multigenerational coresidence has been considered a typical setting for elderly care. It is followed by examination of the extent to which the elderly in Korea view family, self or the state as primary sources of support. Recently, the Korean government has made a great deal of effort in developing programs to supplement self-care and family care-giving. Understanding the norms and expectations of old age support and how they

have changed would provide telling indicators of the acceptability as well as demand for support from non-familial sources (Kim C. and Rhee 1999b).

As discussed earlier, coinciding with actual trends in living arrangements of the elderly, their attitudes have also been shifting from multigenerational coresidence to independent living. Furthermore, even among the elderly who want to live with their children, the proportion of those who prefer to live with the eldest son, in keeping with the traditional norm, has been diminishing, while the proportion mentioning any available child has been rising (Kim C. and Rhee 1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Kim C. 2007a). Table 6 shows the preference of elderly parents in terms of coresidence and the child with whom they want to live in 2004. As shown in Table 7, about one-fourth of the elderly aged 65 and over considers coresidence with children a necessity. This proportion differs by age group, being greater among the young elderly. Among those who believe that coresidence is necessary in old age, more than half prefer to live with the eldest son. Nonetheless, the proportion with no particular preference in terms of sex and birth order of the child turns out to be sub-

Table 6. Desire for Coresidence with Children and Choice for Coresident Child among the Elderly Aged 65+ in 2004

(Unit: %)

|       | Desiring coresidence (%) | Preferred child for coresidence |         |          |           |        |     | Sum | Cases |
|-------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|---------|----------|-----------|--------|-----|-----|-------|
|       |                          | Eldest son                      | Any son | Daughter | Any child | Others |     |     |       |
| All   | 26.6                     | 56.0                            | 9.7     | 1.1      | 30.6      | 2.6    | 100 | 805 |       |
| Age   |                          |                                 |         |          |           |        |     |     |       |
| 65-69 | 18.7                     | 58.1                            | 6.1     | 0.8      | 31.6      | 3.4    | 100 | 227 |       |
| 70-74 | 28.2                     | 54.4                            | 12.7    | 0.7      | 30.0      | 2.3    | 100 | 252 |       |
| 75+   | 35.6                     | 55.9                            | 9.8     | 1.7      | 30.3      | 2.3    | 100 | 326 |       |

Source: 2004 Korean Elderly Survey. Cited from Chung et al. (2004).

stantial. In addition to the low proportion of the elderly who insist on multigenerational coresidence, the substantial proportion of elderly who say that any child would be fine for coresidence indicates the distance from traditional norms of coresidence, particularly in terms of eldest sons.

Table 7 compares the attitudes of the elderly toward old age support in 1994 and 2004 through the survey question, "Who should take the most responsibility for the elderly?" Despite the differences

Table 7. Attitude of the Elderly Aged 60+ Concerning Who Should Take the Main Responsibility for Elderly Support in 1994 and 2004

(Unit: %)

|                     | Self | Family* | The State | Others** | Total | Cases |
|---------------------|------|---------|-----------|----------|-------|-------|
| <b>Year of 1994</b> |      |         |           |          |       |       |
| All                 | 44.5 | 26.2    | 20.5      | 8.8      | 100   | 1,269 |
| <b>Sex</b>          |      |         |           |          |       |       |
| men                 | 54   | 18.2    | 24        | 3.7      | 100   | 483   |
| women               | 38   | 32.6    | 17.6      | 11.8     | 100   | 748   |
| <b>Age</b>          |      |         |           |          |       |       |
| 65-69               | 49.7 | 23.4    | 19.9      | 7        | 100   | 549   |
| 70-74               | 43.8 | 25.4    | 23.9      | 6.9      | 100   | 390   |
| 75-79               | 40.1 | 28.1    | 19.2      | 12.6     | 100   | 902   |
| 80+                 | 31.3 | 38.0    | 15        | 15.7     | 100   | 124   |
| <b>Year of 2004</b> |      |         |           |          |       |       |
| All                 | 40.2 | 18.7    | 40.9      | 0.2      | 100   | 3,008 |
| <b>Sex</b>          |      |         |           |          |       |       |
| men                 | 49.9 | 11.2    | 38.5      | 0.4      | 100   | 1,132 |
| women               | 34.2 | 23.8    | 41.9      | 0.2      | 100   | 1,751 |
| <b>Age</b>          |      |         |           |          |       |       |
| 65-69               | 49.8 | 11.9    | 37.9      | 0.4      | 100   | 1,210 |
| 70-74               | 38.4 | 18.7    | 42.8      | 0.2      | 100   | 896   |
| 75+                 | 29.2 | 27.9    | 42.9      | 0.1      | 100   | 902   |

Notes: \* The category of "family" include children.

\*\* The category of "others" in 1994 include the proportion who answered "don't know."

Source: 1994 Korean Elderly Survey and 2004 Korean Elderly Survey. Cited from Rhee et al. (1994) and Chung et al. (2004).

in measurement and wording of the question between two surveys, it is clear that the proportion emphasizing family/child responsibility has declined, whereas the proportion stressing the responsibility of the state has increased. The proportion emphasizing self-care remains at a high level through the years. The differentials by sex and age are distinctive. In both years, elderly women are more likely than elderly men to state that family or children are responsible for elder care. This sex differential suggests that elderly women are more confined than elderly men to their family in supporting themselves, which in turn results from their limited opportunities to prepare for old age over the course of their lives. In terms of age, younger elderly are less likely than older elderly to emphasize family/children responsibility. Thus, as young cohorts succeed the older cohorts of the elderly, the emphasis put on family/children for old age support is weakened.

## Summary and Discussion

Combined with the rapid population aging, changes in intergenerational family relationships have become an important issue in contemporary Korea. Based on the observation that increasing numbers of elderly parents live apart from their children and there are frequent reports of helpless elderly parents are abandoned by their children, many view the family ties between generations as eroding. Given the changes in the economy, society and culture, as well as the demographic trend of fewer children and longer life, the willingness and/or capability of children to support their elderly parents may become weaker than before. Nonetheless, as this paper examined, the intergenerational family relationships appear to have become diverse and heterogeneous over the last decades.

The increase of elderly parents living apart from their children cannot solely be attributed to the attitudinal changes of the young generation. Preference for independent living in old age is as prevalent as the desire for multigenerational coresidence among the elder-

ly. Provided that they are physically and financially able to do so, the elderly want separate residences from their children. Indeed, young elderly who are more likely to be married and able to support themselves tend to live apart from their children. Thus, independent living for many elderly is a result of their own decision making. Furthermore, for them, separate residences are transitional. The majority of the elderly tend to eventually live with their children, when their health begins to decline. This suggests that the children continue to be sources of support for ailing elderly parents, regardless of their willingness or capability.

Separate residences between elderly parents and their children do not necessarily mean the dissolution of intergenerational family ties. The increase in independent living among the elderly is accompanied by living close to the children in different residential units as well as frequent contact with them. In addition, many elderly parents receive various types of support within or across the household and provide support in turn to their children. The family-centered nature of these exchanges of support appears not only in the current direction of support but also in the expectations of the elderly in the event of a time of need. The contact person in cases of emergency among the elderly is almost always one of their children.

The change in attitude concerning old age support is also observed among the elderly. The necessity of coresidence has become less prevalent. Among those wanting to reside with their grown children, the preference is still given to the eldest son, reflecting the strong tradition of the patrilineal and partilocal family system. Nonetheless, a substantial number of elderly people have stated that they will live with whatever child is available. This practical approach in choosing which child to live with indicates another aspect of change. In terms of who should take the responsibility for elderly support, an increasing proportion of the elderly emphasizes state responsibility while the proportion stressing traditional family responsibility is in decline. This seems to reflect the ideas of the elderly that the burdens of family in supporting the elderly should be shared or supplemented by the state.

The above findings suggest that attitudes and behaviors concerning intergenerational family relationships have been changing not only among the young generation but also among the elderly. Greater diversity and heterogeneity are emerging in the process of these changes. There is no sufficient evidence to indicate that intergenerational family relationships are declining as a whole. Compared to the changes in the family structure in Western countries, the intergenerational family relationship in old age has been undergoing rapid change in Korea. The process of compressive societal change adds to this complexity and bears witness to the presence of premodern, modern and postmodern family relationships.

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