

# Characteristics of and Determinants of Life Satisfaction Among Elderly Korean Immigrants in Los Angeles\*

LA 거주 한국이민노인의 생활만족도 결정요인과 특성\*

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## CONTENTS

I. Introduction

II. Life Satisfaction

III. Date & Method

IV. Results

VI. Summary, Conclusion &

Implications

References

## =요 약=

본 연구는 美 L-A에 거주하는 한국이민 노인들의 특성을 파악하고, 그들의 생활만족도에 기여하는 결정요소들이 무엇인지 가려내며, 그 얻어진 결과를, 동일한 시각과 접근으로 시도되었던 미국 노인들에 대한 선행연구들의 결과와 비교 분석하였다.

연구는 1986년 12월에서 1987년 2월까지 3개월간 美 L-A 카운티에 거주하는 55세 이상의 한국 이민노인 390명을 대상으로 설문지 조사를 실시하여 그중 192명을 자료분석에 사용하였다.

단계별 중다 회귀분석의 결과, 활동성의 제약정도, 결혼상태, 재정적인 안정, 교육정도, 연령증가 등 5가지 변인들이 특별히 한국노인의 생활만족도와 강한 연관성이 있었고, 반면 자신들이 평가한 건강상태, 他人과의 사회적인 상호작용, 미국거주 年限 등은 노후생활의 안녕에 전혀 직접적인 영향력을 행사하지 못했다. 그러나 자신들이 평가하는 건강상태는, 활동성의 제약 등과 같은 다른 변인에 미치는 효과를 통해서 생활만족도에 간접적으로 強하게 영향을 미치고 있었다. 이러한 결과를 先行연구에서 나타난 서구나 미국老人의 생활만족도 결정의 세 요인인 건강상태, 사회경제적 지위, 사회적 활동성과 비교해 볼때, 사회적 활동성과 연령증가 변인에서 서로 상반되는 대조를 보이고 있었다. 즉, 백인노인들은 나이가 들에 따라

\*본 논문은 필자(1987)의 미국남 캘리포니아 대학교 대학원(Leonard Davis School of Gerontology) 석사 학위 논문의 일부를 요약 발췌 수록한 것임.

생활만족도가 낮아지거나 혹은, 연령증가와 생활만족도 사이에 별로 유의할 만한 관계를 보이지 않고 있으나, 본 연구에서의 한국노인은 나이를 먹으면서 오히려 생활만족도가 높은 것으로 나타났다. 한편, 사회적 활동성은, 백인노인의 생활만족도에 긍정적 혹은 부정적으로 가장 강하게 영향을 미치는 요인中 하나임에 反하여, 한국老人들은 이것이 자신들의 생활만족에 중요한 것이라 믿고는 있었지만 실제 통계학적으로는 영향력을 행사하지 못하는 요인이었다. 주거환경(자식과의 동거여부) 역시, 이제껏 한국사회에서 기대되어왔던 통념과는 달리, 한국老人의 생활만족도에 아무런 영향을 주지 못하고 있었다.

## I. INTRODUCTION

With a rapid increase in the older population, scientists, policy makers, and human service practitioners have tried to identify the factors which influence the quality of life of the elderly. As they become older, individuals must adjust to some changes. For example, there are several noticeable changes in body function. They may also experience diminished income in retirement, which could mean a restriction in life style. This economic change could also contribute to the development of such physical conditions as malnutrition. In addition they have to face some critical social changes, including loss of some of their significant roles, among peers, in the family, and in the community. All these physical, economic, and sociological changes can be interrelated and can interact with each other or produce additional condition to be adjusted to. With those changes occurring in old age, the elderly have been viewed as a disadvantaged group in our society, in terms of lower status, segregation, loss of roles, and financial difficulties.

Unlike other older people, however, the minority elderly experience additional difficulties. That is, minority elderly face not only the problems associated with being old, and often poor but also the accumulated problems of a lifetime of membership in a minority group.

For these reasons the Korean elderly were se-

lected as a sample population. In addition because the Korean elderly are relatively recent immigrants we expect even more severe problems to be associated with their disadvantaged social conditions and minority racial status. A language barrier, an unfamiliar societal structure and customs make the situation worse, presenting even greater obstacles to their coping power than that with which the English-speaking native born are confronted. Because of these barriers, the Korean elderly are in multiple jeopardy.

## PROBLEMS TO BE STUDIED

Moving to another country with an unfamiliar culture can be a real challenge to the Korean elderly. They have to cope with aging related difficulties in a different society.

The present study is specifically designed to describe how the Korean elderly live in this new land, explore what factors determine their level of life satisfaction, and examine differences between Korean and majority American elderly. Knowledge about older Koreans living in America obtained from this study can indicate future directions for appropriate planning in both research and human service delivery for the Korean elderly population. There are two specific study objectives :

- 1) To describe the characteristics of Korean elderly.
- 2) To examine the determinants of life satisfac-

tion among the Korean elderly.

## II. LIFE SATISFACTION

Most researchers consider life satisfaction to be the primary ingredient in "the good life and the ultimate criterion of "successful aging." Under this general belief, analysis of life satisfaction takes two different forms. The first is to examine how the general level of life satisfaction is affected with the advancement of age. The research in this line asks whether people become more satisfied or less satisfied as they grow older. The ideal research framework in this case would be longitudinal study, that is, tracing a group of individuals' degree of contentment over time. With one exception(Palmore 1981), however, most of the research is cross-sectional, measuring differences among different age groups. Results may, therefore, reflect sampling errors between age categories, or cohort differences between successive generations.

The second line of research attempts to investigate the predictors of life satisfaction of the elderly. This research implicitly assumes that individuals with different personal and/or socioeconomic characteristics experience different levels of life satisfaction as they grow older, and tries to figure out the most important factors that affect the later life satisfaction. The present study follows the second line of research and attempts to sort out the factors which are important in the determination of the life satisfaction among elderly Korean immigrants. The age variable in this study, therefore, does not purport to capture the age-related general well-being of the elderly, but the marginal effect of getting one year older when all other variables are controlled.

## HEALTH

Among studies examining the antecedents of life satisfaction, health has generally been shown to be a central concern in later life. Palmore and Luikart(1972), for instance, found that self-rated health was "by far the strongest variable related to life satisfaction". Other studies have also found a strong association between self-rated health and life satisfaction (Clark, Anderson 1967; Lowenthal, Boler 1965; Spreitzer, Snyder 1974).

Health may contribute to life satisfaction through its impact on other variables concerning the general well-being of the elderly. The relationship between self-rated health status and social participation has been documented by several studies(e.g., Bultena, Oyler 1971; Gubrium 1970). According to them, poor health serves as a potential constraint on the building of interpersonal relationships by limiting mobility and, consequently, the number of possible friends and confidants. Limited mobility may also alter the pattern of interpersonal relationships, restricting the interaction only within household members, kin, and neighbors. Individuals in poor health may also have to undergo a reduction in their income due to the limitation or loss of their productivity.

## INCOME

Empirical findings regarding the importance of income level to life satisfaction have been mixed. Some studies have found income to have a "pervasive influence"(Hutchison 1975), while others have found essentially no relationship(Bortner, Hultsch 1970). One possible explanation for these inconsistent findings is that the studies used inadequate controls. Two other studies,

using extensive controls, found there to be a moderate relationship(Edwards, Klemmack 1973; Palmore, Luikart 1972). According to palmore and Luikart, "income" may provide more of the basic necessities related to life satisfaction such as adequate food, housing, security, recreation, and social status"(Palmore, Luikart 1972. 74).

### ACTIVITY

Activity has been regarded as one of the most controversial factors affecting life satisfaction in later life. Currently there are two competing theories regarding the relationship between the level of activities and successful adaptation to aging: one theory states that maintaining a high level of activity in old age keep elderly happy (Lemon et al. 1972), while the other indicates that activity makes older people unhappy or reduces the level of their life satisfaction(Cumming, Henry 1961).

### LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

The housing of elderly people can intensify or lessen many of their social, physical, psychological, and financial problems. The house in which an older person lives in this study is understood only in relation to the other persons with whom they live, i.e., whether they live alone, or with relatives, and whether or not they head their own household.

Living arrangements of the aged tend to show a new movement toward independent living in this industrialized and urbanized society. With the provision of various welfare programs for the aged such as income maintenance, health care, and housing, older people are more likely to prefer and be able to afford independent living.

There is evidence that the elderly prefer to live near their children, but not with them(Resenmayr, Kockeis 1962; Streib 1958). Koh(1983),

in his study of older Koreans living in New York, found that some 50% of his respondents had separate households and that more than 70 % of them expressed their desire for independent living in the future.

### AGE

Another most controversial question in gerontology is whether growing old makes people more satisfied or less satisfied, or has no effect. There is no conclusive evidences gathered to date. Some studies have found fairly strong positive relations between older age and life satisfaction(Cantril 1965; Campbell 1976; Lowenthal et al. 1975). On the other hand, other studies have shown an equally strong negative relation between age and life satisfaction(Chatfield 1977; Lowenthal, Boler 1965; Thompson 1977). Still other studies have claimed that there is little or no relationship between increased age and life satisfaction(Palmore 1981). Campbell et al. (1976) found both positive and negative relation between age and happiness. People are happier as a whole because of greater achievement and perhaps lowered expectations, but they are also less happy than younger persons because of diminished income, poor health etc.

In summary, three factors have been found repeatedly to correlate highly with life satisfaction among the American elderly. They are health, particularly self-rated health, income and amount of social activity. Additionally, education, socioeconomic status, presence of a confidant, marital status, and presence of others in the household are also related moderately with life satisfaction.

## III. DATA AND METHODS

### POPULATION AND SAMPLING

This study was carried out on 192 Korean el-

derly 55 years of age and over residing in Los Angeles. Since the number and addresses of Korean elderly in Los Angeles were not available for systematic random sample, five elderly groups in the Korean community and one ethnic church were chosen to obtain research participants. Some ethnic organizations have been established as influential ethnic elderly centers in the Korean community.

Besides ethnic organizations, another significant type of organization among the Korean immigrants is religious organization such as the ethnic churches and temples.

#### DATA COLLECTION

As the first step, the investigator personally contacted the members of five Korean elderly groups when they were attending a monthly meeting. The investigator introduced the purpose of the study and then distributed a pre-tested questionnaire. The next step was to contact the ethnic church that the investigator attends. After the Sunday service, the investigator met many older people and deliver the same introduction and questionnaires as previously distributed to the members of ethnic organizations

Questionnaires were distributed to 390 elderly and 192 of them were returned by mail, for a response rate of approximately 50%.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN AND QUESTIONNAIRE CONSTRUCTION

Prior to distribution of the questionnaire, existing instruments were reviewed for general applicability to the older Korean population and revised to be culturally sensitive. Not only did the actual wording of the instrument have to be tailored to meet the educational and social characteristics of this population, but it had to be carefully translated into Korean to accommodate the Korean older persons, who tend to be monoli-

ngual. A 64-item self-administered questionnaire (included in Appendix B) which addressed several topics was distributed. In addition to basic demographic variables, socioeconomic information, such as number of living relatives, and self-rated health, financial status, and social activity were also gathered. Measures of social activity covered frequency of contact with friends and relatives, satisfaction with this contact, and participation in meetings and activities in the community-at-large. Respondents were also asked about the seriousness of problems which affected them personally. Attitudes regarding life satisfaction and aging were collected by asking for responses to a set of statements about aging and older people. Responses were to a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A life satisfaction score was calculated by combining additively all item responses so that a high score reflected higher life satisfaction.

The life satisfaction scale used in this study consisted of four Likert-type items which are similar to items included in Neugarten et al.'s Life Satisfaction Index(1961). The Likert-type scale on which this study heavily relies is regarded as one of the most frequently used measurements of life satisfaction.

Correlation coefficients were computed between the individual life satisfaction items and the total scale score. The resulting values range from 0.45 to 0.80, which was considered sufficiently high to combine the items into a life satisfaction index.

#### ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

The data collected from the 192 respondents were coded and processed through the ABSTAT computer program. First, the respondents' demographic/socioeconomic characteristics, social activity, and perceived problems were examined

by descriptive statistics, simple correlation analysis and cross tabulations. Second, a multiple regression analysis was performed to identify the factors that most affect life satisfaction of the elderly Korean immigrants.

#### IV. RESULTS

##### DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Of the total of 192 respondents who responded to the study, 114(59.4%) were males and 78(40.6%) were females(see Table 1). The majority (79.7%) of the sample were between the ages of 55 and 74 and one-fifth(20.3%) were from 75 and 87 years old. Almost half of this population (4.69%) received ten or more years of education, whereas only one-third of the respondents (35.4%) had a primary or lower level of education. Most of the respondents have a severe language problem.

The majority of the sample(73.8%)were married and had living spouses. More than one-fifth (22.5%) were widowed. More than half of the respondents(51.6%) have lived in the United States for 5 years or less. In the majority of the cases(71.4%), the reasons why respondents came to the U.S.A. were related to living with or doing something for their children.

Of the 116 respondents living independently from their adult children, the majority of the respondents(79.3%) were satisfied with that living situation. Only 8.6% of the respondents wanted to join their children if possible. On the other hand, about one-third of the respondents(35.4%) living with their adult children were dissatisfied with the dependent situation and more than one-fifth of the respondents(23.6%) wanted to live independently if possible.

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents(61.6%)

Table 1. Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics

	N	%
Total sample	192	100.0
Age		
55~64	43	22.4
65~74	110	57.3
75 and over	39	20.3
Sex		
Male	114	59.4
Female	78	40.6
Years of school completed		
No schooling	0	0
Sodang or		
1~ 6(Primary school)	68	35.4
7~ 9(Middle school)	34	17.7
10~12(High school)	53	27.6
13 and more (College and higher)	37	19.3
Length of residence in the United States		
1 to 5 years	99	51.6
6 to 10 years	69	35.9
10 years or more	24	12.5
Living arrangement		
Living alone separately in own home/apt./cond.	25	13.0
Living with spouse in own home/apt./cond.	91	47.4
Living with adult children	76	39.6
Satisfaction with living arrangement		
Independent living from adult children		
Very satisfied/somewhat satisfied	92	79.3
Dissatisfied but this is better way	14	12.1
Dissatisfied and want to join children	10	8.6
Total	116	100.0
Dependent living with adult children		

홍숙자 : LA 거주 한국이민노인의 생활만족도 결정요인과 특성

Very satisfied/somewhat satisfied	49	64.6
Dissatisfied but this is better way	9	11.8
Dissatisfied and want to move out	18	23.6
Total	76	100.0
<b>Command of english</b>		
	N	%
Very well	0	0
Well	17	8.9
Not well	121	63.7
Not at all	52	27.4
Total	190	100.0
<b>Health status</b>		
Poor	23	12.1
Fair	50	26.3
Good	94	49.5
Excellent	23	12.1
Total	190	100.0
<b>Limitation of activity due to health</b>		
Always	8	4.4
Frequently	21	11.4
Sometimes	88	48.1
Never	66	36.1
Total	183	100.0
<b>Financial status</b>		
Better off than most	4	2.1
Slightly better off	14	7.4
About the same	111	58.7
Slightly worse off	48	25.4
Worse off than most	12	6.3
Total	189	100.0
<b>Reason why they came to U.S.A.</b>		
To live with children	85	45.0
To take care of adult children's family	45	23.8
To live financially better off	43	22.8

For children's education	5	2.6
Other	11	5.9
Total	189	100.0

reported their health condition as being excellent (12.1%) or good(49.5%). Actually less than sixteen percent(15.8%) experienced limitation in activity "always" or "frequently" because of health.

The self rated financial situation of this sample is not positive. About only ten percent of the respondents thought they were better off financially and nearly one-third(31.7%) thought they were worse off than others of their age.

#### SOCIAL ACTIVITY AND INTERACTION

The great majority(91%) have some form of contact with relatives at least once a week. The respondents' contacts with friends either in person, by phone or mail was more frequent than with the relatives(see Table 2). The great majority(92%) of respondents reported having some form of contact with a close friend at least once a week.

More than half of the respondents in this study(57.2%) belong to a church and religious group. In addition the majority of the sample(77.7%) attend meetings of some kind of social activity at least once a month.

#### LIFE SATISFACTION

A final portion of the survey asked participants to respond to a series of statements meant to indicate Life Satisfaction and reflect attitudes towards aging. Four of the statements were used as included indicators of "Life Satisfaction" and were later combined to form an "index of life satisfaction". All the items in the life satisfaction index are interrelated and serve as a good indicator for life satisfaction(Table is omitted).

Table 2. Social activity and interaction

Contact with relatives per week	N	%
No contact	16	8.7
Once a week	67	36.6
Two to three times a week	47	25.7
Four to five times a week	27	14.8
Six to ten times a week	17	9.3
More than ten times a week	9	4.9
Total	183	100.0
Contact with friends per week		
No contact	14	7.6
Once a week	42	22.7
Two to three times a week	60	32.4
Four to five times a week	48	23.2
Six to ten times a week	18	9.7
More than ten times a week	8	4.3
Total	185	100.0
Attending meetings of community activities		
None	8	4.6
Less than once a month	7	4.6
Once a month	24	13.7
Two to three times a month	42	24.0
Four or more a month	94	53.7
Total	175	100.0

RELATIONSHIPS OF LIFE SATISFACTION WITH OTHER VARIABLES

In this section, using Pearson Correlation Coefficients, the relationship of life satisfaction to demographic, social and economic characteristics are examined(see Table 3). Health status, limitation of activity, level of financial well-being, education, and marital status are found to be related to life satisfaction, while those variables such as age, years of residency in America, living arrangement, and number of children are not related to life satisfaction.

In this simple correlation stage, surprisingly enough, there is a lack of relationship between life satisfaction and some variables which were

thought to be likely to be related. For example, length of residence in America, living arrangement, number of children, and age are regarded as important variables in terms of unique features of Korean elderly immigrants.

In the next table we relate items indicating

Table 3. Pearson correlation coefficients between life satisfaction and demographic, socio-economic variables

Demo/socio-economic factors	Life Satisfaction
Self rated health	.34*
Limitation of activity	-.32*
Financial well-being	.25*
Years of education	.24*
Marital status	.22*
Age	.11
Years of residency in America	.04
Number of children	.18
Living arrangement	.05

P<.05

N ranges from 163 to 169

Table 4. Pearson correlation coefficients between life satisfaction and social activity and satisfaction with contact

Social activity	Life satisfaction
Amount of contact with relatives	.11
Amount of contact with friends	.11
Frequency of community activity participation	.01

p<.05

N ranges from 154 to 164

Satisfaction with contact

With relatives .-14

With friends .-14

P<.05

N ranges from 161 to 179



social activity with friends and relatives and organized activities to life satisfaction. Indicators of both the frequency and satisfaction are included in this section.

As can be seen in Table 4, there is no significant relationship between life satisfaction and social activity such as the amount of contact with relatives or friends and the frequency of community activity participation. There is no significant relationship between life satisfaction and satisfaction with contact with relatives or friends.

#### REGRESSION ANALYSIS

The present section examines which factors among all the variables are the strongest predictors of the life satisfaction among the Korean elderly immigrants.

Before running the regression analysis, a matrix of the correlations among the independent variables was examined for multicollinearity. None of the between variables was  $r = .7$ . The highest correlation between variables was  $r = .66$  between the measures of health and limitation of activity. Among the other variables no correlation exceeded  $r = .52$ . As such, it is judged that inclusion of all 14 variables in the regression would not create any serious statistical problem.

As a preliminary step, a regression with all 14 independent variables and the life satisfaction index as shown in Table 5. Four of the independent variables—higher educational attainment, little limitation of activity, increasing age, and marital status were found to have a significant effect on life satisfaction. Living arrangement, satisfaction with contact with friends, and frequency of contact with relatives appeared to be less related to life satisfaction than those four variables.

Those variables such as participation in community meeting, health, financial status, the number of children, the amount of contact with

Table 5. Regression of independent variables in life satisfaction

Variables	Regression Coefficient	T value
Education	.15*	2.52
Limitation of activities	-1.14*	-2.51
Age	.13*	2.48
Marital status	1.14*	2.23
Living arrangement	1.06	1.78
Satisfaction with friends	-.76	-1.36
Contact with relatives	.11	1.17
Community meeting	-.24	-1.00
Health	.39	.95
Finance	.30	.78
Number of children	.11	.70
Contact with friends	.01	.08
Years of residence	-.01	-.06
Satisfaction with relatives	.03	.06

\* $P < .05$

$N = 141, R^2 = .22$

friends, years of residence, and satisfaction with contact with relatives are of little statistical significance.

Following this initial regression with all the independent variables, numerous experimentation with different model specifications have been performed. Since there is no gerontological theory background which can guide us in this specification procedure, conventional "goodness of fitness" measure and "t" values of individual coefficients were used for the criterion of variable

selection.

First, since inclusion of irrelevant variables may unnecessarily increase the variances of the estimates, and thus lowering the "t" values of coefficients, a step was taken to eliminate statistically insignificant variables.

If we drop the variables whose significance levels are more than 10%, and run the regression with the remaining five variables, the same four variables were again found to be significantly related to life satisfaction. The difference between the previous and this step is only in the order of statistical significance. As shown in Table 6, little limitation of activity comes at the top of the list followed by marital status, years of education, and increasing age.

Omission of relevant variables may cause even more serious statistical problem such as estimation bias and inconsistency. A step-wise regression procedure was taken to minimize this risk with sequentially adding variables to those four already found to be statistically significant. The final specification considered to be most satisfactory is reported below. It has limitation of activity, finances, marital status, education, age, and living arrangement as explanatory variables(see Table 7).

Table 6. Regression coefficients of perceived life satisfaction in selected independent variables

Variables	Regression Coefficients	T values
Limitation of activity	-1.24*	-3.81
Marital status	1.61*	2.76
Education	.14*	2.55
Age	.12*	2.49
Living arrangement	.95	1.68

\*P<.05

N=162. R<sup>2</sup>=.16

Table 7. Regression coefficients of perceived life satisfaction in selected independent variables

Variables	Regression Coefficients	T values
Limitation of activity	-1.12*	-3.47
Marital status	1.69*	2.93
Financial status	.79*	2.30
Education	.12*	2.09
Age	.09*	1.99
Living arrangement	.72	1.28

\*P<.05

N=160, R<sup>2</sup>-.22

Among those six variables included in the regression with 160 valid cases, T value reveals that limitation of activity has the strongest effect on the level of life satisfaction. People who feel more limitation in their activities due to poor health appear to have much lower level of life satisfaction.

Marital status was shown to be the second most significant. Those who were married tended to have higher level of life satisfaction than those never married.

Financial status was the third strongest variable related to life satisfaction for the respondents. As they are financially better off, they are more satisfied with their lives. Some earlier studies on American elderly have obtained similar results(Palmore, Luikart 1972; Edwards, Klemmack 1973). Individuals with financial well-being may be able to maintain more mobility and have more of the basic necessities related to life satisfaction.

Years of education and age were the fourth and fifth most significant factors affecting the life satisfaction.

In summary, life satisfaction among this sample of Korean elderly was most affected by, in decreasing order, limitation of activity, marital status, financial well-being, years of education, and increasing age.

Some of these findings are interesting compared to the results obtained in simple correlation coefficient analysis. First, in the simple correlation analysis, self-reported health appeared to have the strongest positive correlation with life satisfaction. In the multiple regression analysis, however, it does not affect life satisfaction, if we control the effects of other variables. Basically, however, both self-reported health and limitation of activity could be indicators of their real health status. The only difference between the two is that self-reported health is based on individual's feeling in comparison to others their age, such as "poor" to "excellent", and limitation of activity is based on their personal experience of limitation in activity due to poor health. This result, therefore, indicates that the self-rated health status does not significantly affect their level of life satisfaction directly. Health affects life satisfaction only through its impact on other variables, particularly its effects on limitation in activity. Once they can maintain a certain level of activity, having additional improvement in health does not affect their life satisfaction.

Second, in the simple correlation analysis, it appears that age has a weak relation with life satisfaction. However, both in the multiple regression with all independent variables and with selected variables, age is found to be significantly related to life satisfaction. The fact that the age variable retains such a high statistical significance even after the effects of all other variables on life satisfaction are controlled is rather surprising. As individuals get older, their lives would undergo many changes in terms of their health,

social interactions, economic status and so on. And all these variables are expected to influence the life satisfaction of the elderly in one way or another. But, after all these influences of changes accompanied by aging are accounted for, will the advancement of age itself have any direct effect on life satisfaction of the older people? The multiple regression analysis provides a positive answer to the questions: Korean elderly get extra sense of life satisfaction from the advancing age independently of its effect on other variables. This finding, therefore, suggests that the Korean elderly immigrants still preserve the traditional Korean values which associate aging with such positive perceptions of achievement, rest, wisdom and respectfulness.

## V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

### EXIGENCIES OF LIFE SATISFACTION

#### Health

If we use the self-ratings of health as an indicator of their health status, Korean elderly immigrants in Los Angeles could be described as "healthy". These assessments are corroborated by their own perception of personal problems: the Korean population does not think health is serious problem compared to the general elderly.

Despite this overall healthiness of the sampled population, marginal change in health status was found to have still the strongest correlation with subjective life satisfaction of elderly Korean immigrants. Both in a simple correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis, health variables, that is, self-assessment of health status or lack of physical disability, ranked first among all variables representing an older person's life situation. Proper interpretation of the result, however, requires a bit of careful examination. When both

the self-rated health and lack of physical limitation variables are simultaneously put in a multiple regression, the former was found to lose its dominant position while the latter retains all its statistical significance. Addition of other health related variables such social activity further reduces the effect of health on life satisfaction. This result, therefore, suggest that health affects life satisfaction indirectly through its effect on other variable such as limitation in activity but not directly.

Another aspect that requires caution in interpretation of the result in the potential simultaneity bias problem : the possibility that the subjective well-being affect back the health. If this is so, the estimated coefficient may be substantially biased and be inconsistent even if sample size is infinitely increased. Technically, resolution of this bias is simple if we can find a third variable which can identify the health variable equation in a simultaneous equation regression. Because of the difficulty in finding such a variable , which affects health but not life satisfaction, this method has not been tried in this paper.

#### Financial Status

When asked to rank the most important variables to their well being, most survey participants responded by putting financially related variables such as medical care, income, and housing on the top of the list. This strong association of financial status with life satisfaction was confirmed in the multiple regression analysis with the financial variable explaining the third largest portion of the total variance. This result is consistent with the majority of findings of the American elderly that older persons of lower socioeconomic status tend to have lower life satisfaction. One salient feature of the current findings is that income maintains its significance even when edu-

cation is controlled or vice versa. In most of the studies on American elderly, these two variables tend to be treated as mutually exclusive because of the strong correlation between the two.

#### Social Activity

There exists no significant positive or negative relationship between life satisfaction in general and any type of social interaction especially frequency of interaction with family, friends, or involvement in community activity. The result indicates that even though the great majority of both male and female respondents think family relationship is very important, the frequency of contacting family is not a critical factor affecting the level of life satisfaction of Korean elderly. Particularly, friends relationship has been more frequently rated as "very important" by male Korean elderly. Interaction with friends, however, has no significant impact on their life satisfaction either. These features suggest that there is a gap between what they "believe" to be important of their life satisfaction and what really affects their life satisfaction in statistically significant way.

From the quality perspectives, the result may be somewhat different. The findings in the present study were that the relationship of life satisfaction to the "quantity" of interaction which is measured by number of children or how often they see each other. The meaningful relationship through which the elderly parents feel loved, cared for, or respected might be better represented by the "qualitative" aspect of interactions instead of the frequency of contacts.

#### Living Arrangement

Living alone or living together with somebody in the same household appeared not to be an significant factor to the lives of Korean elderly immigrants. This is rather surprising in view of

the traditional belief that mostly Korean elderly tend to like living with their children in the same house. Unlike other variables, however, measuring the effect of different living arrangements on life satisfaction has somewhat difficult conceptual problem. Other variables such as health and income which are supposed to have some impact on life satisfaction of elderly can be considered to be exogeneous in the sense that an old individual does not choose his own health status or income level. Living arrangement, however, is mostly a product of deliberate choice of an individual or a group of people. And it would be safe to assume that an individual will choose the best living arrangement they can afford given the various constraints they face. Once the decision is made, they know there is nothing they can do about it. Under this situation, the effect of living arrangement on life satisfaction is likely to be small or neutral.

#### Years of Residence

How long an individual has lived in the same place could affect the feeling of security and stability particularly in the case of immigrants newly settled in a foreign land. Therefore it seems natural to expect that years of residence could be of great importance for the level of Korean elderly's life satisfaction. Surprisingly enough, however, length of residence in America appears to have no particular influence on the life satisfaction of Korean elderly. One potential explanation for this unexpected result would be that there is not enough variation in the sample. Other than that, further exploration is needed to determine why this intuitively plausible hypothesis does not hold for elderly Korean immigrant.

#### Age

Age was proved to affect level of life satisfaction of Korean elderly in a significant way. The

advancement of age itself has direct impact on life satisfaction of the Korean elderly. This stands in sharp contrast with the result obtained in the research on American elderly whose subjective well-being is usually found to be negatively correlated with age or not correlated at all. The traditional view that Koreans look forward to enjoying the prestige of growing old with rather pleasant time of relaxation and leisure, and new freedom from the heavy responsibility for the whole family, therefore, appears to be confirmed by this study.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Throughout this study, we have tried to explore the predictors of life satisfaction of elderly Korean immigrants. Five variables were found to have a especially strong relationship with life satisfaction : lack of limitation of activity, marital status, financial well-being, education, and increasing age. Health, social interaction with others, and length of residency in America are, however, shown to have no direct influence on the subjective well-being of their later life.

By and large, these results from Korean elderly are, therefore, consistent with those from their American counterparts whose life satisfaction is believed to be strongly associated with health, socioeconomic status and social activity in descending order. Differences, however, appear for some individual variables, notably for social activity and age.

#### LIMITATION OF STUDY AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study attempted to determine which factors influence life satisfaction among this population. When the final regression was run, it accounted for 22% of the variance in life satisfaction, leaving over seventy percent unexplained. It suggest that there might be some important va-

riables affecting the well-being of the elderly left out. Further exploration of the explanatory variables would, therefore, be a promising investment in the future.

For testing the validity and reliability of this study, it would be useful to try this research with older Koreans still residing in Korea to see the differences and similarities.

In order to increase generalization, it might be desirable to have a larger, randomly selected sample from several big cities.

In spite of the limitation of this study, it adds significantly to our knowledge of the Korean elderly in Los Angeles. Further study is warranted to determine if these results are representative for other newly arrived immigrant groups.

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