

**Co-Residence of Divorced and Widowed Adult Children with
Their Mothers in South Korea**

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INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, Confucian values and norms that consider family as a fundamental institution of society has substantially influenced family behaviors, imposing strong pressure on “deviant” family behaviors such as divorce and nonmarital childbearing in South Korea (Park and Cho 1995). Despite a remarkable expansion of education during the last few decades that has made Korean young women as most highly educated women in the world, Korean women still have the limited economic opportunity as revealed by considerably low levels of labor force participation (Brinton 2001). Only half of Korean women at working ages participate in labor force. Studies of Korean labor market highlight women’s significant disadvantages in terms of employment, wage, and kind of job (Sandefur and Park 2007; Mon-Turner and Turner 1994).

In contrast to the limited opportunities for women’s economic independence and strong cultural sanctions against divorce that are often considered as depressing divorce, however, divorce in Korea has sharply increased since the mid-1990s. Figure 1 presents trends in crude divorce rate (CDR), which indicates the number of divorces per 1,000 inhabitants. The crude divorce rate is problematic because it does not take into account differences in age structure. However, in the absence of better measures, the change in crude divorce rate provides a glimpse of the divorce trend. After the relatively low level until the early 1990s, Korea’s crude divorce rate has been rapidly increasing, especially since the late 1990s. Compared to 1.1 in 1991, the rate soared to 2.5 in 1998 and then went up again to 3.5 in 2003. Important is that the recent level of divorce in Korea is similar to or even higher than the levels of most Western countries and Japan, except for the United States.

The dramatic increase in divorce makes of paramount the question of vulnerable economic conditions of divorced parents, especially mothers and their children, given the limited economic opportunities of Korean women. Moreover, the considerably low levels of public welfare provision for families in Korea make economic insecurity of single-mother families particularly serious. Several international statistics highlight Korea's conservative welfare system. In 2000, public expenditure on family (including both cash and other kinds of benefits) accounted only 0.1 percent of GDP (Growth Domestic Product) in Korea, the lowest level among OECD countries. In the same year, countries like Denmark, Finland, and Norway spent over 3 percent of GDP for public expenditure on family (OECD, 2004). It is well known that in Korea, individuals and their families bear primary responsibility for the cost of college education, whereas in many other countries college education is supported by the state (Park 2004).

The rising divorce and economic vulnerability of divorced parents and their children has important implications for social stratification (McLanahan 2004). Studies of single-parent families and their children in the United States and Western countries consistently show educational disadvantages of children growing up with a single parent as compared to their counterparts from two-parent families (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Borgers, Dronkers, and Van Praag 1996). One of the major factors that explain educational differences between children from single-parent and two-parent families is the lower income of single-parent families. Another important explanation of educational differences by family structure is the lower levels of parental involvement in children's education among single-parent families due to the fact that single parents often have to work full-time to meet economic needs (Astone and McLanahan 1991). Therefore, along

with the lack of state support to single-parent families, children of single parents in Korea may be at particularly great risk of educational disadvantages.

On the other hand, however, in the absence of strong welfare system, the extended family system in Korea has long played an important role in providing economic and social help to vulnerable family members. Describing strong family ties in Southern European countries, Reher (1998) illustrates that Southern European countries with strong families have been more successful in dealing with homelessness, unemployment, or single parenthood than countries with weak families such as the United Kingdom and the United States. In fact, Reher classifies family ties in Asia as even stronger than those in Southern Europe. As a country in Asia, strong family ties in Korea may be an important safety net for vulnerable family members including single-parent families, particularly in the context of weak public welfare. Studies showing a substantial degree of private transfers among extended family members toward those economically disadvantaged highlight the role of strong family ties in Korea (Goh, Kang & Sawada, 2005).

In sum, the recent family changes in Korea, especially the rise in single-parent families due to parental divorce, have important implications for differentials in economic and social resources among different types of family, which ultimately may lead to differentials in educational and other social outcomes among children growing up in different types of family. The lack of strong welfare state makes the issue particularly important in the Korean context. However, in order to better address the potential consequences of family changes for the well-being of Korean children, systematic attention should be paid to the role of extended family system (family ties) that has long

functioned as agency for providing welfare to family members in the absence of public welfare system. A detailed understanding of the process through which the extended family system buffers economic insecurity of single parents and their children and provides emotional support to single-parent families will help assess the potential consequences of rapidly rising divorce for the well-being of divorced parents and their children.

Among many ways in which the extended family system may help single-parent families, co-residence with grandparents should be particularly important for children of single parents. While literature tends to consider co-residence in regard to its benefits to old parents, co-residence may be also beneficial to the co-resident child and her own children (Palloni 2001). For instance, grandparents may not only contribute to the economy of family but also provide child care, supervision and emotional support to children of single parents, which should facilitate single parents to work in full time. As an attempt to examine the way in which the extended family system buffers consequences of growing up with a single parent, in this paper I study how living arrangements of Korean women aged 60 or order depend on their children's marital status. Specifically, I assess the extent to which divorced or widowed adult children live with their mothers as compared to married children. The finding that divorced or widowed adult children are more likely to live together with their mothers than married adult children will corroborate the role of the extended family system in the Korean context.

LITERATURE OF CO-RESIDENCE

As Cameron (2000) appropriately pointed out, previous literature on co-residence has mainly focused on characteristics of old parents as affecting their living arrangements without simultaneously looking at the effects of adult children's characteristics. Largely due to the lack of data that have detailed information on co-resident and non-co-resident children of old parents, studies only could include aggregate measures pertaining to children such as the number of children by age and gender (DaVanzo and Chen 1994). Given that co-residence is a joint decision process, the exclusive focus on parents' characteristics is apparently limited in examining the roles of children's characteristics in affecting living arrangements between old parents and their children. Moreover, the way in which a variable is related to co-residence may differ depending on whether co-residence is viewed from parent's perspective or the adult child's perspective (Grundy 2000). From the parent's perspective, the number of children increases the likelihood for the parent to live with a child, while from the child's perspective, the number of children of the parent means the number of siblings, which may reduce her likelihood of co-residence with the parent. Although some studies examined living arrangements in Korea, mostly they looked at only characteristics of old parents (Won and Lee 1999; Martin 1989).

In responding to the limitation, a growing number of research has attempted to model co-residence predicted simultaneously by both parent's and child's characteristics (Cameron 2000; Soldo and Tfamily 2007). Those studies utilize data that provide detailed information on co-resident and non-co-resident children of old parents, extending our understanding of co-residence decision process. However, because many of those studies

deal with a developing country where prevalence of divorce is still considerably low,¹ they do not examine the likelihood of co-residence among divorced children as compared to children in other types of marital status, but distinguish only between married and non-married children.

In contrast to studies that focused on living arrangements of older adults, however, studies that looked at living arrangements of middle-aged adults in the United States and other Western countries paid more direct attention to the differences by marital status in prevalence of co-residence with parents among middle-aged adults (Grundy 2000; Beck and Beck 1989). Those studies argue that it is children's characteristics rather than parent's characteristics that play a greater role in the decision of co-residence. Therefore, from this perspective, the more appropriate question for research on co-residence is not "which parents live with adult children," but "which children live with parents" (Wald, Logan, Spitze 1992). This approach uses the adult child as the unit of analysis, examining the effects of child's characteristics as well as of parent's ones on the likelihood for a specific child to live with parents. In regard to the effect of child's marital status on the likelihood of co-residence, the common finding in the United States and England is that non-married adult children are much more likely to co-reside with parents than married adult children. The tendency for divorced adult children to live with parents is between the tendency for non-married children and married children. As these studies have exclusively focused on the United States and some other Western countries, the examination of differentials in co-residence with their

¹ For instance, Cameron (2000) studied Indonesia, while Soldo and Tfamily's (2007) study looked at the Mexican case.

parents among adult children in different marital status in a non-western context will be an important extension of the literature.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In line with the literature that emphasizes the need of looking at characteristics of both parents and adult children (Soldo and Tfamily 2007; Wald et al. 1992), in this study I examine how both parents' and adult children's characteristics affect the likelihood of co-residence in Korea, focusing on the effect of children's marital status, especially comparisons among four groups of adult children: divorced/separated, widowed, non-married, and married children. Specifically, I conduct two analyses of co-residence, first from the perspective of the mothers and then from the perspective of their adult children. The first analysis is done with the mothers as the unit of analysis to examine the effects of mother's characteristics and aggregate measures of children such as the number of children on the likelihood of co-residence with an adult child aged 25 or older. In this analysis, the focus is to what extent mothers who have divorced/separated or widowed adult children are more likely to co-reside with an adult child as compared to mothers who do not have such adult children (among mother who have at least one adult child aged 25 or older).

The analysis at the level of mother can examine whether having a divorced child increases the probability of living together with an adult child. However, the analysis does not actually reveal whom the mother lives with. In other words, the analysis does not show to what extent a divorced adult child is more likely to live together with her/his mother than a married adult child. Therefore, a different analysis is done with the adult

child as the unit of analysis to examine how the child's characteristics and the mother's characteristics are related to the likelihood that a given child lives with the mother. A major interest in this analysis is to assess the extent for divorced/separated, widowed or non-married adult children to live with the mother as compared to their counterparts of married adult children. The data used in this study provide information on major characteristics of all surviving children (both co-resident and non-coresident), which makes it possible to examine the issue.

DATA AND METHOD

Data

The data for this study come from the baseline survey of Korean Longitudinal Study of Ageing (KLoSA) conducted by Korea Labor Institute in 2006. As a national representative survey of middle/old-aged population (45 or older), KLoSA collected detailed information on living arrangements of respondents with each child (up to the 10th child), in addition to various characteristics of respondents in the arena of demography, family, employment, income, assets, and subjective expectations and satisfaction. Not only respondents' characteristics but also those of respondents' children (both co-resident and non-coresident) were collected by respondents (parents)' self-report. Therefore, it is possible to examine how both respondents' and children's characteristics affect living arrangements of respondents with their children. KLoSA first surveyed households and then surveyed all household members aged 45 or older. The

response rate at the household level was 70.7 percent, while the response rate at the individual level was 89.2 percent. The size of total samples was 10,254.²

In this study, I focus on mothers, considering that those who can provide child care and household services to single parents and their children are more likely to be grandmothers rather than grandfathers. Furthermore, I limit the analysis to those women aged 60 or older, following previous literature that mostly focused on the age group (Cameron 2000; DaVanzo and Chen 1994; Martin 1989). The exclusion of women younger than 60 years is also relevant for the purpose of the current study that examines living arrangements of respondents with their adult children. Many of those women younger than 60 years have young children who are not adult yet and therefore need to live with their parents. Apparently, living arrangements with young children should be distinguished from living arrangements with adult children.

Method

The first analysis is to examine characteristics of the mother that affect her likelihood of living with an adult child. The samples for the analysis are the mothers who are 60 years or older and have at least one adult child aged 25 or older (the size of the samples is 3,074). The co-residence is defined as the mother living with an adult child aged 25 or older. A major interest in this analysis is whether having at least one child who is divorced or widowed increases the likelihood that a mother lives with an adult child (not necessarily the divorced or widowed child but any child). Because the outcome is binary, I use logit models to predict the mother's likelihood of living with an adult child. I include various covariates that have been included in previous studies of

² See Shin, Bu, and Lee (2007) for more details of KLoSA survey.

co-residence including mother's age, education, health, marital status, number of children, homeownership, and rural/urban residence. Mother education is classified into three categories: primary school or less, middle school, and high school or above. Mother's health is measured with the respondent's report on the question "have you ever received disability diagnosis from a doctor?" It is a dichotomous variable (yes = 1, no = 0). Mothers are distinguished into three groups in regard to their marital status: divorced/separated, widowed, and married. Finally, homeownership indicates whether the owner of the house the mother resides in now is her (yes = 1, no = 0).

For the second analysis of predicting a given child's likelihood of co-residence with her/his mother, the child of the respondent (mother) in KLoSA is the unit of the analysis. In KLoSA, the total number of children for 3,088 women who are 60 years or older and have at least one child is 11,876. Among those children, I exclude those who are younger than 25 years, resulting in total 11,755 adult children to be analyzed. The outcome variable is whether the adult child lives with her/his mother, The predictor of major interest is whether the adult child is divorced/separated, widowed, or non-married as compared to being married. Covariates include the child's age, gender, education, number of own children, and working status. Children's education has three categories: middle school or less, high school, and college or above. Working status indicates whether the adult child is engaged in any paid job. Also included as predictors are mother's characteristics that were used for the first analysis with the mother as unit of analysis (i.e., mother's age, education, health, marital status, number of children, homeownership, and rural/urban residence). Given the binary feature of the outcome variable, I use the logit model to predict the child's likelihood of living with the mother.

Note that depending on the number of children, there can be multiple observations of children per mother. Therefore, I report robust standard errors to take into account the multiple observations per mother.

RESULTS

Table 1 classifies mothers who are 60 years or older and have at least one child aged 25 or older by marital status of children. Among total 3,074 mothers, 86.5 percent have children who are either married or non-married. About 9 percent of those 3,074 mothers have at least one child who is divorced or separated, while about 4 percent of mothers have at least one child who is widowed. 20 mothers have at least one divorced/separated and one widowed child. The last column of the table presents the percentage of mothers who live with at least an adult child aged 25 or older for each type of mothers. 44 percent of mothers who have no divorced or widowed child live with at least one adult child, while 62 percent of mothers who have at least one divorced child but no widowed child do so. 69 percent of mothers who have at least one widowed child but no divorced child live with at least one adult child and half of 20 mothers who have both divorced and widowed children do so. Overall, 46 percent of mothers live with at least one adult child, highlighting a substantial degree of co-residence with the adult child in Korea. Although the table shows that mothers who have divorced or/and widowed children are more likely to live with an adult child than their counterparts who do not have such children, it is important to remember that the table does not show whom mothers live with. Mothers who have a divorced or widowed child may not live with the divorced or widowed child but another married child.

In order to examine whether a divorced child than a married or non-married child is more likely to live with the mother, Table 2 presents the distribution of adult children by their marital status whose mothers are 60 years or older. Of those 11,755 adult children of the mothers who are 60 years or older, 85 percent, 3 percent, 1 percent, and 11 percent are married, divorced/separated, widowed, and non-married, respectively. The last column of Table 2 shows that only 9 percent of married adult children live with the mother, while 39 percent of divorced adult children do so. The percentage of widowed children living with the mother is 26 percent and the corresponding percent of non-married children is 46 percent. The simple descriptive statistics highlight the higher prevalence of co-residence among non-married, divorced, or widowed adult children than married children.

The Logit Model of Co-Residence among Mothers

Table 3 presents the result of binary logit model that predicts co-residence of mothers with at least one adult child aged 25 or older. The second and third columns display coefficients and their associated standard errors. To facilitate interpretation of coefficients, the last column presents coefficients as forms of odds ratio (i.e., $\exp b$). The bivariate relationship in Table 1 showed a substantially higher percentage of living with at least one adult child among mothers with at least one divorced or widowed child than among their counterparts with no such child. The multivariate analysis in Table 3 confirms the relationship even after controlling for other covariates.³ Specifically, the odds of living with at least one adult child for the mothers with at least one divorced

³ For the multivariate analysis, mothers with at least one divorced and one widowed child were combined with mothers with at least one divorced child because of their small number of cases (N = 20).

child are 1.76 times the odds for mother with no divorced or widowed child, which is statistically significant. Similarly, mothers with at least one widowed child are significantly more likely to live with at least one adult child than mothers with no divorced or widowed child.

Turning to effects of other independent variables, age reduces mother's likelihood of living with at least one adult child with a diminishing degree as the age square term shows the positive coefficient. Surprisingly, mother's education is not significantly associated with her likelihood of co-residence with an adult child. This null effect of education is partially consistent with a previous study that found little evidence of variation in living arrangements of Korean older people by major socioeconomic variables (Martin 1989). Separately looking at older women and men in Malaysia, DaVanzo and Chen (1994) found no significant effect of education (even seemingly positive effect) for women, consistent with the current finding in Korea. However, they found a negative effect of education for men in Malaysia, suggesting potential gender difference in the relationship between education and co-residence.

Widowed mothers show a higher likelihood of co-residence as compared to married mothers, while there is no significant difference between divorced and married mothers. However, a caution is needed due to the very small number of divorced mothers. Having disability diagnosed by doctor is not significantly associated with co-residence. There is no evidence that number of children is related to the likelihood of co-residence. Home ownership is a strong predictor of co-residence: mothers who own their house are much less likely to live with at least one adult child. Finally, the odds of co-residence are significantly greater among those who reside in urban than in rural areas.

The Logit Model of Co-Residence among Adult Children

Table 4 presents the result of binary logit model that predicts adult children's co-residence with their mothers by both children's own and mother's characteristics. The major focus of the analysis is whether divorced/separated adult children are more likely to live with mothers as compared to their married counterparts. The coefficients of children's marital status indicate much greater odds of co-residence for all three groups of children as compared to married children. The odds for divorced adult children to live with their mothers are 8 times the odds for the married children, while the odds for widowed children are 4 times the odds for the married children. Non-married adult children also show a significantly higher likelihood of co-residence than married children. The result is generally consistent with the finding in the United States where the degree of co-residence among divorced adult children is intermediate between the degrees for non-married and married children.

The age of the child is negatively associated with co-residence with a diminishing degree. Daughters are much less likely to co-reside with the mother. The child's own fertility increases the likelihood of co-residence with the mother. Those who are engaged in paid job are also more likely to live with the mothers. Interestingly, children with high school diploma or college degree have the greater odds of co-residence than their counterparts with middle school education or less. Although the positive effect of children's education is somewhat inconsistent with previous literature, it is important to note that the current study separates divorced, widowed, and non-married children from married children. Previous studies mostly distinguished only between married and others. Although both divorced and non-married children are more likely to live with the mother

than married children, divorced and non-married children are quite different in their education. The current data show that divorced children have much lower levels of educational attainment than married children, while non-married children have much higher levels of education than married children. Hence, separating divorced and non-married children from married children resulted in stronger effects of education on co-residence.

The next set of coefficients shows how mother's characteristics are associated with the likelihood for the adult child to live with the mother, once children's characteristics are taken into account. Remember that this model, which is on the basis of the adult child's perspective, is distinguished from the model in Table 3, which was on the basis of mother's perspective. Mother's age and education do not affect the adult child's likelihood of co-residing with the mother, once the child's own attributes are controlled for. Adult children of widowed mothers are more likely to live with the mother than adult children of married mothers. Similar to the model for mothers in Table 3, mother's home ownership reduces the likelihood that an adult child lives with her, while residing in the urban area increases the likelihood. Although it was not a significant predictor in the model for mothers in Table 3, the number of children the mother has now significantly reduces the likelihood that an adult child lives with the mother. From the child's perspective, the number of mother's children corresponds to the number of siblings, whose effect on the living arrangement of the child is different from the effect of the same variable on the living arrangement of the mother (Soldo and Tfamily 2007). The increase in the number of siblings is negatively associated with the likelihood that an adult child lives with the mother.

CONCLUSION

This study is based upon the premise that co-residence is an important way for the family system to provide economic and social support to vulnerable family members, like single parents and their children. In the context of rapidly growing divorce under the weak welfare state, it is important to understand how the family system intervenes to buffer negative consequences of growing up with a single parent for children. This study focused on the level of co-residence among divorced adult children compared to their married counterparts in the Korean context. Taking into account both the mother's and the child's characteristics that affect the likelihood of co-residence, this study showed that divorced or widowed adult children are much more likely to live with mothers than married children. The level of co-residence among non-married adult children was also significantly higher than the level among married children. The result highlights that the Korean family system plays an important role in providing welfare to vulnerable family members. More research is needed, however, to look at specific economic and social transfers between old parents and their adult children, in addition to co-residence, to fully understand the function of family system.

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Table 1. Mothers aged 60 or older who have at least one surviving child age 25 or older

	Distribution		% of Co-residence
	N	%	
No child divorced/separated or widowed	2,658	86.5	43.8
At least one child divorced/separated, no widowed child	281	9.1	61.9
At least one child widowed, no divorced/separated child	115	3.7	68.7
At least one child divorced/separated and one child widowed	20	0.7	50
Total N	3,074	100.0	46.4

Table 2. Marital status of those aged 25 or older whose mothers are aged 60 or older

	Distribution		% of co-residence with the mother
	N	%	
Married	10,014	85.2	8.7
Divorced	331	2.8	39.0
Widowed	151	1.3	25.8
Non-married	1,259	10.7	45.9
Total N	11,755	100.0	100.0

Table 3. Binary logit analysis of predicting co-residence of mothers with at least one adult child

	b se	exp (b)
Having divorced or widowed children (reference: no divorced or widowed child)		
At least one child divorced/separated	0.567 (0.134) ^{***}	1.76
At least one child widowed, no divorced/separated child	0.521 (0.229) [*]	1.68
Age	-0.488 (0.095) ^{***}	0.61
Age ²	0.003 (0.001) ^{***}	1.00
Education (reference: primary school or less)		
Middle school	0.120 (0.137)	1.13
High school or higher	0.032 (0.144)	1.03
Marital status (reference: married)		
Divorced	-0.339 (0.381)	0.71
Widowed	1.058 (0.094) ^{***}	2.88
Disability diagnosed (reference: no)	0.084 (0.172)	1.09
Home ownership (reference: no)	-0.778 (0.108) ^{***}	0.46
Number of children	0.039 (0.026)	1.04
Urban	0.862 (0.094) ^{***}	2.37
Constant	15.487 (3.420) ^{***}	
Pseudo R ²	0.106	
Sample N	3074	

*** p < .001 ** p < .01 * p < .05

Table 4. Binary logit analysis of adult children's likelihood of co-residence with mothers

	b se ^a	exp (b)
Child's Characteristics		
Marital status (reference: married)		
Divorced	2.066 (0.144)***	7.895
Widowed	1.267 (0.237)***	3.551
Non-married	2.651 (0.115)***	14.166
Age	-0.152 (0.036)***	0.859
Age ²	0.002 (0.000)***	1.002
Female	-1.020 (0.081)***	0.36
Education (reference: middle school or less)		
High school	0.542 (0.090)***	1.719
College or above	0.575 (0.099)***	1.777
Number of own children	0.141 (0.037)***	1.152
Working for pay	0.345 (0.084)***	1.412
Mother's Characteristics		
Age	0.104 (0.069)	1.109
Age ²	-0.001 (0.000)	0.999
Education (reference: primary school or less)		
Middle school	0.059 (0.110)	1.061
High school or higher	-0.052 (0.119)	0.949
Marital status (reference: married)		
Divorced	-0.120 (0.324)	0.887
Widowed	0.721 (0.073)***	2.056
Disability diagnosed (reference: no)	-0.067 (0.120)	0.935
Home ownership (reference: no)	-0.467 (0.088)***	0.627
Number of children	-0.245 (0.021)***	0.783
Urban	0.648 (0.077)***	1.912
Constant	-4.380 (2.233)*	
Pseudo R ²	0.231	
Sample N	11,755	

^a Robust standard errors

*** p < .001 ** p < .01 * p < .05