

PROVIDING CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENTS IN NURSING HOMES  
FOR FRAIL ETHNIC MINORITY ELDERLY IN THE U.S.: THREE CASE STUDIES OF  
KOREAN AMERICAN NURSING HOMES

Eun-Hee Lee

Dr. Benyamin Schwarz, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Korean American elders are one of the fastest growing Asian ethnic subgroups in the United States, adding to the growing cultural and linguistic diversity of the older population. Yet no published study was found on Korean American nursing home environments and the needs, preferences, and levels of satisfaction of Korean American residents in ethnic nursing homes in the United States. The main purpose of this study is to describe the physical, social, and organizational environments of nursing homes in order to increase their cultural appropriateness and thus improve the quality of life for frail Korean American elders. There were multiple data collection methods, but three case studies of Korean American nursing homes on the East Coast included interviews with 26 Korean American elders, 6 relatives, and 5 staff members. All facilities emphasized organizational environments (e.g., special services and activity programs) over physical and social environments. All had some Korean staff and provided Korean foods at meals, church services in Korean, cultural activities, and Korean cable-TV channels. Through qualitative data analysis, 2 main themes and 9 subthemes emerged. Korean American elders were less likely to be assimilated into American culture and wanted to maintain the Korean way of life in a U.S. nursing home. Although residents were satisfied with the facilities overall, they expressed two major dissatisfactions: no freedom and nobody to talk with them. The findings of this study will contribute to the knowledge of nursing home care providers and designers of nursing homes where many Korean American residents live.