

# DIFFERENCES IN AWARENESS RELATED TO HEALTH AND HOME-LIFE: A COMPARISON OF FAMILIES WITH AND WITHOUT AN ALLERGY PATIENT

Hiroko Ichimune, Osaka Shoin Women's College

For the past couple of decades, the number of allergy patients in Japan has been increasing remarkably. Among them are many children who suffer from asthma, atopic dermatitis, and sinus problems due to allergies.

It has been said that one-third of the Japanese now have some kind of allergy. This increase in allergy patients has resulted in a change in home construction methods. The sultry climate in Japan requires good household ventilation. The traditional Japanese home with wood frame construction was drafty, and therefore was able to provide natural ventilation. Recently, however, houses are being built more air-tight, and with good insulation, causing a reduction in ventilation by one-sixth. Additionally, some of the new materials, such as glue, emit harmful gases. The general public is hardly aware of the intricate relationship between their health and the condition of the houses they live in.

A survey was used to gather data for this study. The sample was divided into two groups: households with an allergy patient and households without an allergy patient. By comparing the two groups, the study aimed to see the differences in their home-life, and in their awareness of matters relating to their "health-life," when choosing a house to live in.

The survey was conducted in July and August of 1997 at three different elementary schools. Teachers distributed questionnaires to students for their parents to answer. A sample of 759 families was collected. The survey, in search of allergy-related factors, consisted of questions with regard to the home environment, preferential points concerning home improvement, choice of interior building materials, and daily household management. In addition, twenty questions were asked relating to daily behavior in the home. The analysis involved two main points of interest to the researchers: 1. Do people have accurate knowledge of issues of health in everyday life? 2. Do people act upon this knowledge when choosing a house to live in?

The results were as follows:

1. Allergy patients' families comprised 40.7 percent of the samples. Certain complaints about their houses had some relationship with allergy patients' families. Complaints,

such as mold, mites, odors in their houses, and drafts had recognized statistical significance between the two groups.

2. The allergy patients' families, when renovating or remodeling their homes, considered using harmless materials, whereas non-allergy families did not.
3. The allergy patients' families exhibited a tendency to select wood flooring rather than carpets for their houses.
4. The allergy patients' families showed higher awareness of chemical-related allergies.
5. The survey showed that the allergy patients' families do have accurate knowledge of a healthy life and act upon it on a daily basis. For example, they avoided insecticides, moth repellents, and tobacco smoking, and tended to own fewer stuffed animals or cushions. They avoid hanging laundry inside the house, and keep curtains up off the floor.

In conclusion, allergy patients' families care more about their health than families without an allergic member. But their care is limited and insignificant. In most of the surveyed families, people recognized the importance of ventilating rooms by opening windows, and of airing bedding in the sun, and did take these measures. There are, however, some examples of the gap between awareness and practice: e.g., use of antibacterial products, dehumidifying the home in winter time, cleaning air-conditioner filters, mopping and wiping, and leaving some space between furniture and the wall. It is important, therefore, to spread accurate knowledge about healthy home living practices and their effectiveness in ameliorating allergic conditions.