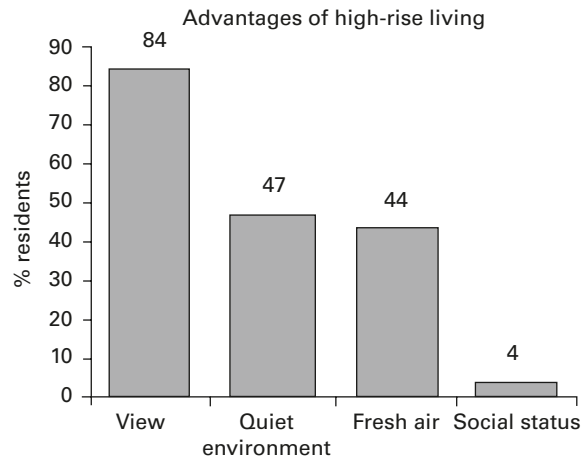


Figure 8.2
Travel time from home to work
in Hong Kong. (Source: Lau and
Li, 2001–2002.)

generation of super high-rise towers in both office and residential developments that are now rapidly changing the silhouette of the city. The norm in Hong Kong is for 80-storey office buildings or for 60-storey apartments. The continuous increase in building heights is a direct result of the city's provision for an ever-growing population, increase in gross domestic product (GDP), and a shortage of land. A high FAR of a maximum of 8 in the inner urban areas, together with government-controlled restrictions in land supply, produces a vertical concentration in the city's growth. This urban concentration also means convenience and efficiency for city dwellers, with multiple floor levels with different uses and reduced traffic congestion and pedestrian flow by means of vertical stratification. The UN (2000) claims that the vertical urban planning approach of Hong Kong, stacking floors with different usages on top of another, produces one of the most energy efficient urban built forms in the world.

A recent survey² of 102 residential households indicated a majority (64%) who liked to live on higher floors for the enjoyment of better views and fresh air, ranking these higher than other factors such as the monetary benefit of being on a higher floor (Figure 8.3). The same survey also investigated concerns over the psychological damage to young children growing up in high-rise apartments. The majority of mothers, asked about the effects on young ones, replied positively (98%), and noted that the artificial ground, which is a common feature

Figure 8.3
 Percentage of residents citing
 advantages of high-rise living.
 (Source: Lau and Li, 2001–2002.)



on the roof of most podium decks on which the high-rise residential towers sit, offers a welcome and safe place for their children.

Sky city

In such a ‘sky city’, events and activities do not just take place at ground level. Pedestrian footbridge networks (or skywalks) are found in both commercial and residential developments. In a dramatic way, numerous double-level web-like all-weather walkways crisscross in and out of buildings, over pavements and roads providing an above-ground connection between different land uses. The multi-layering and segregation of pedestrian movement from vehicular movement stem less from planning theory, and more because there are simply too many people moving around on the narrow pavements at ground level. Today, more than 90 major office buildings under different ownership in Hong Kong’s central business district (CBD) were linked to each other or to other public walkway networks by covered walkways. These are accessible 24 hours a day, resulting in an open CBD that is operable at all hours. The network of skywalks, and escalators which climb the hilly topography, enable residents to walk easily to and from work and back home in all weathers. Like their counterparts, the double-decker bus, double-decker ferry and double-decker tram, the double-level pedestrian movement system exemplifies the ‘sky city’ concept. The intensive use of footbridges and escalators helps to promote the sharing of