Gender, migration and well-being of the elderly in rural China

Shuzhuo Li¹
Marcus W. Feldman²
Xiaoyi Jin¹
Dongmei Zuo¹

1. Institute for Population and Development Studies, Xi’an Jiaotong University
2. Morrison Institute for Population and Resource Studies, Stanford University
MAIN TOPICS

- Introduction
- Aging and elderly well-being: A national picture
- Impact of out-migration on well-being of the elderly in rural China: Why and how
- Tradition and evolution of family support for the elderly
- Conclusions and prospects
INTRODUCTION

- Rapidly declining fertility and persistent low mortality accelerated population aging in China.

- Large-scale rural-urban migration and decreased family size weakened family support for the elderly in rural area.

- Social security system is far more developed in cities while a reliable pension system has not been established in rural areas. The majority of rural elders rely on their children.

- The traditional culture of filial piety is undergoing a transformation. The elders are losing their original authorities within a household.
- **Objectives**
  - The impact of out-migration on the well-being of the elderly in rural China
  - Exploring the role of gender differentials

- **Well-being of the elderly**
  - Intergenerational support
  - Physical and psychological health
Fieldwork

- **Longitudinal study of well-being of the elderly in Chaohu, Anhui Province, China.**
  - **Survey site:** Relatively high density of older adults and high rates of out-migration of young adults;
  - **Sampling and respondents:** Random sampling of 1,800 rural people aged 60 and above, using a stratified multistage sampling method.

- **Elder-care, gender, and son preference among rural-urban migrants in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China.**
  - **Time:** April, 2005
  - **Survey site:** Highest proportions of rural-urban migrants among Chinese cities;
  - **Sampling and respondents:** Random sampling of 1,739 rural-urban migrants;
AGING AND ELDERLY WELL-BEING: A NATIONAL PICTURE

1. China’s Population Transition

- In the past five decades, China has been experiencing dramatic population changes. (Figure 1)

- This has had a profound impact upon China’s population structure. Population aged rapidly.
Figure 1: China’s total fertility rate, 1950-2005

1. China’s Population Transition - population aging

- Current situation
  - The proportion of elders aged 65 and above was 7.7% in 2005 (Figure 2)

- Features
  - High proportion: The proportion aged 60 and above was 11.4% in 2007, ranking the 64th in the world (the 11th in Asia) (Figure 3)
  - High speed: The doubling time of population aged 60 and 65 years old ranks 19th and 24th, respectively, in Asia.
  - Huge size: The population aged 65 and above reached 100.55 million, ranking, in 2005, the largest in the world.
  - Rapid growth of the oldest old: The growth rate of population aged 80 and above is about twice that for the population aged 65 and above.
Figure 2: Percentage of the population aged 65 and above in China: 1950-2050

Figure 3: Average annual growth rate of the elderly population, 1990-2050: International comparison

AGING AND ELDERLY WELL-BEING: A NATIONAL PICTURE

2. Migration from rural to urban areas

- The “floating population” increased 21-fold during the last 20 years
- The “floating population” was 147 million in 2005 and keeps growing (Figure 4)
- Female migrants increased: Male and female migrants ratio is 125:100 in 1990, dropped to 101:100 in 2005
- As migrants tend to be young, population aging is greater in rural areas: 73.7% of the population aged 60 and above reside in rural areas in 2006.
- The proportion aged 80 and above in rural area will be 13 percent higher than in urban areas in 2050 (Zeng, 2005)
Figure 4: Size of rural-urban migrant population: 1982-2005 (Unit: 10,000 persons)

AGING AND ELDERLY WELL-BEING: A NATIONAL PICTURE

3. ‘Crisis’ in old-age support in rural China

- Universal pension and health care systems have not been established in rural areas.
- Family, mainly adult children, still serves as the primary source of old-age support for the Chinese rural elderly. (Figure 5)
- Migration weakens family support for the elderly.
Figure 5: The income source of China people aged 60 and above in rural and urban area in 2000

Resource: The 5th China national population census
AGING AND ELDERLY WELL-BEING: A NATIONAL PICTURE

4. The income and health condition of Chinese elderly

- A national survey in 2006 reveals that: Average annual income was 11,963 yuan (RMB) for urban elderly and 2,722 yuan for rural elderly in 2006; rural women earned the least
- Self-care ability and chronic conditions: Males are better than females, the elderly in urban area are better than those in rural area, rural females are the worst off
- Psychological well-being of the rural elderly is lower than that of the urban elderly
- Life expectancy of the female elderly is longer than male elderly, but the ratio of disability-free life expectancy for females is much lower (Figures 6 and 7)
Figure 6: The life expectancy for male and female Chinese elderly in 2004

Figure 7: Ratio of disability-free life expectancy to life expectancy for male and female Chinese elderly in 2004

1. Intergenerational Corporate and Exchange

- Intergenerational transfer is mainly upward (from children to elderly); Providing old-age support is still the core content.

- Children’s migration promotes the intergenerational "reciprocal" exchange behavior and, indirectly, exchange among children.
2. Impact on Intergenerational Support (Figure 8)

- Economic Support
  - Migrant children provide more support
  - Beneficial to the psychological and physical health of the elderly.

- Instrument Support
  - Out-migration lowers the instrument support children provided
  - Help with household chores can be psychologically helpful, but help with personal care has a negative effect.
2. Impact on Intergenerational Support (Figure 8)

- Emotional Support
  - Migrant children provide more support
  - Helps to build more harmonious family relations, but still cannot offset the loneliness of the elderly.

- Grandchildren Care
  - Elder parents provide more help for migrant children
  - Helps to generate more economic and psychological returns, but increases burden of childcare.
Figure 8: Average amount of intergenerational support: Comparison by adult children’s gender and migrating status

Resource: The well-being of the elderly in Anhui Province, base-line survey in 2001
3. Impact on the household by gender (Table 1)

- Changes by gender for elderly parents
  - Elder mothers tend to increase the transfers with adult children, by which they receive more compensatory support.
  - Elder fathers benefit more from economic help by children.
  - The negative impact on instrument support to elder fathers is more significant.

- Migration of adult children has increased the burden on elder mothers who are usually the main family care providers.

- “Activity of daily living” and “self-rated health” of elder mothers are both worse than elder fathers.
Table 1: The impact of children’s migration on economic and instrument support:

HLM estimation (N=983)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Economic Support</th>
<th>Instrument Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children → Father</td>
<td>Children → Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having migrant son</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.277***</td>
<td>0.209***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.986*</td>
<td>-0.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.336</td>
<td>-0.725*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having migrant daughter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0.285***</td>
<td>0.265***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.322</td>
<td>-0.227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-0.148</td>
<td>-0.889**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandchildren care</td>
<td>0.006</td>
<td>0.011*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.117**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.132*</td>
<td>0.208***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living Arrangement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with spouse or alone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>0.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.027*</td>
<td>0.936**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.418***</td>
<td>2.670***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live with children or their spouse</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.137*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data: The well-being of the elderly in Anhui Province, base-line survey in 2001
3. Impact on the household gender division (Figure9)

- Changes in the gender division of adult children
  - Weakening gender division in economic support
  - Weakening gender division in instrument support
  - Expanding gender differentials in emotional support

- Children’s migration increase the importance of daughters in the family support for the elderly.

- Nevertheless, because Chinese traditional family support for the elderly still has sons as the primary providers, these changes have brought negative impact on psychological health of rural elders.
Figure 9: Impact of children’s migration on gender division in intergenerational support: Logistic regression results (Reference=none migrant)

Resource: The well-being of the elderly in Anhui Province survey, base-line and the first follow-up wave in 2001 and 2003
TRADITION AND EVALUATION OF FAMILY SUPPORT FOR THE ELDERLY

Retaining Tradition

- Family old-age support is prevalent, sons are still the primary providers.
- Rural elderly women are traditionally assigned more domestic chores and remain more vulnerable.
- The traditional stem family is still the desired family structure for the rural elderly.
- The filial piety concept is still dominant.

Changes

- Time-money exchange
- Elderly parents become more vulnerable
- The traditional concepts are modernizing
- Daughter’s role is strengthening
CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

Conclusions

- Labour migration has significant impacts on the traditional family support, now characterized by coexistence of tradition and changes. Modernization and social transition have had a negative impact on elder’s health in rural China.
- Chinese rural elderly make a great contribution to their family, alleviating burden of childcare and agricultural fieldwork for the younger generation.
- Migrant rural women are playing an increasingly important role in old-age support. With the reduction in the number of children, traditional mode of primarily relying on sons is becoming more and more unrealistic.
- The negative impact of children’s migration is more significant on the female elderly.
CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

Prospects: Policy suggestions

- Increase financial budget for social security (pension, medicare and others) and social assistance.
- Strengthen economic independence of elders is a crucial way to improve their quality of life.
- Strengthen the cultural construction on "filial piety" and improve elders’ social and family status.
- Promote equal rights and obligations for old-age support between sons and daughters by means of “Care for Girls " campaign, other advocacy and legislative means.
- Institute policies to improve rural elderly women’s well-being.
- Gradually eliminate the differentials in social security between rural and urban population.
Thanks!