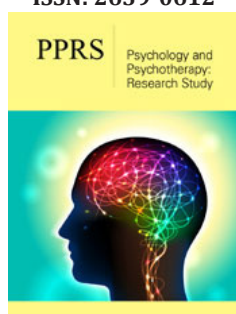


Mini Review of the Relationship between Social Support and Subjective Well-Being among Older Adults in China

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Mini Review

Subjective well-being in later life is important to individuals, their families, and society, because it dictates how we think, feel, and behave [1]. However, studies in China have found that Chinese older adult's subjective well-being is much worse compared to 20 years ago [2]. This decrease may be due to methodological differences, but it may also reflect changes in social support that China has experienced in recent years. Chinese culture (i.e., the Confucian norm of filial piety) expects adult children to be the primary providers of support for their older parents by living with them [3]. However, significant societal and economic transitions (e.g., children's migration, one-child policy) since the 1980s have weakened the traditional social support pattern of older adults [4,5]. Empirical studies conducted during the past several decades have focused on the relationship between social support and subjective well-being among Chinese older adults. The majority of them explored the main effect of social support on Chinese older adults' subjective well-being. They found that having a bigger social network (e.g., more friends), receiving assistance or financial aid when needed, and frequent contact with others were positively associated with Chinese older adults' subjective well-being in China [6-17].

Some studies using Chinese samples also examine the relationship between sources of social support and older adults' subjective well-being. Most of them focused on children's support and generally found that it was beneficial to Chinese older adults' subjective well-being [3,18-20]. Studies examining the relationship between support from non-child sources and subjective well-being among Chinese older adults have been relatively scant and found mixed results. For example, some studies reported a positive relationship between friendship and subjective well-being among Chinese older adults [14,21-24] whereas others found no significant relationship between friends' support and subjective well-being [25,26]. In addition, although the stress-buffering model [27] is one of the dominating theories regarding social support, the potential stress-buffering role of social support for Chinese older adults' subjective well-being has been largely overlooked in the literature. Very few studies using Chinese older adult samples have examined the stress-buffering effect of social support, and they found family support had a stress-buffering effect, whereas support from friends did not [13,28-30]. Overall, although many empirical studies have examined the relationship between social support and Chinese older adults' subjective well-being, some knowledge gaps need to be addressed. First, the buffering effect of social support has been far less studied in this research area. Second, support from non-child sources (e.g., spouse, neighbors, friends, or professional services) has been overlooked, a critical gap considering changes in living arrangements among Chinese older adults from living with children to living with a spouse only or alone. Studies addressing these knowledge gaps may better unveil the relationship between social support and subjective well-being among older adults in China and have great implications for both policy and practice in serving this population.

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