

Study on the Impact of Children's Economic Support on Social Participation of Urban and Rural Elderly People

-- Empirical Research based on CHARLS

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Abstract: With the acceleration of China's aging population and the significant problem of fewer children, this study aims to explore the phenomenon of neglecting the social participation status of the elderly. To this end, the 2018 China Health and Elderly Care Tracking Survey was adopted. Using CHARLS data and STATA data analysis method to study the impact of children's economic support on the social participation of elderly people. The research results indicate that children's economic support has a significant positive impact on the social participation of the elderly, and this result is tested for endogeneity and robustness. The heterogeneity test between urban and rural areas shows that the positive impact of children's economic support on social participation of rural elderly is higher than that of urban elderly; Gender heterogeneity test shows that children's economic support has a positive impact on female social participation. Research has found that female participation has a higher positive impact than male participation. In addition, for elderly people who do not take care of their grandchildren, the economic support of their children has a significant negative impact on their social participation, while the positive impact on elderly people who take care of their grandchildren is not significant. The research in this article helps to clarify the actual impact of children's economic support on the social participation of the elderly, and improve the implementation effect of active aging policies.

Keywords: Economic Support for Children; Social Participation; Urban and Rural Elderly People.

1. Introduction

According to the seventh national population census data, the total population of China is 1.412 billion, of which 264 million are aged 60 and above, accounting for 18.7% of the total population. This data indicates that the problem of population aging is very severe [1] [2]. In this context, how to enable elderly people to enjoy their later years and actively participate in social activities has become a challenge in achieving the goal of a healthy China. The concept of active aging, with social participation at its core, has become a good strategy to address the issue of population aging. This concept advocates for the continuous participation and role of the elderly in social activities, thereby suppressing and eliminating the marginalization of the elderly population. In our country, this concept is being widely practiced[2]. At the same time, traditional Chinese filial piety culture is also the most basic support for elderly people to be raised and relied on. The ancients said that when parents are present, they do not travel far. Nowadays, with the progress of society and the development of science and technology, filial piety culture is more reflected in the economic support and emotional care of children towards their parents. This article is based on quantitative purposes and uses the indicator of financial support from children to parents to measure the living standards of elderly people in their later years.

The ultimate goal of promoting active aging is the social participation of the elderly, and the economic support of children will inevitably affect social participation. Based on this, this article conducts a systematic study from the perspective of social participation, clarifying the logical relationship between children's economic support and elderly social participation, and clarifying the channels through which children's economic support has a substantial impact on social participation [2].

2. Literature Review

2.1. A Study on the Connotation and Influencing Factors of Social Participation

Social participation, as the core of the positive aging concept, mainly refers to the sum of beneficial activities that the elderly participate in for society or others, and is an important way to meet the spiritual support and realize self-worth of the elderly. Existing literature extensive exploration has been conducted on the influencing factors of social participation, which can be broadly divided into three main aspects: firstly, individual level factors, covering multiple characteristic differences such as age, gender, economic status, health status, and education level, among which health status is particularly valued. Previous studies have found that good health is an important foundation for elderly people's social participation[2]; Secondly, at the family level, including factors such as marital status and intergenerational relationships, studies have found that living with children and having a spouse will enhance the willingness of elderly people to participate in society; Thirdly, at the social level, including national policies and factors affecting the elderly, social systems and social ecology play an important role. Among these factors, an open and positive social ecology can often effectively promote the better integration of elderly people into society and unleash their potential. Therefore, scholars propose to provide impetus and driving force for the social participation of the elderly from the perspectives of supply, demand, and environment, while creating a good family environment [2].

2.2. A Study on the Influence of Intergenerational Support on Social Participation of Elderly People

In recent years, intergenerational support has attracted widespread attention in the field of elderly population research. Several scholars have conducted in-depth discussions on how intergenerational support affects the social participation of older adults through different survey data and research methods. Zhang Wenjuan et al. (2006) found, based on the health and longevity survey data of elderly people in China, that emotional communication in intergenerational support has a significant impact on the psychological status of elderly people. In particular, intergenerational support from sons plays an important role in maintaining and improving the psychological status of the elderly[3]. Wang Dahua (2004) and others found through self-designed questionnaires and scales that parent-child support has a positive impact on the self-esteem, loneliness, and gratitude of the elderly, thereby enhancing their subjective well-being[3]. Wang Ping (2011) and others used tracking survey data from rural elderly people in Anhui Province to point out that two-way economic and emotional support can help slow down the decline of cognitive function in elderly people, but excessive reliance on daily care of adult children may accelerate the decline. Meanwhile, they believe that the economic support, household chores, and emotional support that older adults receive from their children all enhance their life satisfaction[3]. Liu Quan (2014) Through comprehensive social survey data in China, it was found that intergenerational relationships have a significant impact on the happiness of elderly men's lives. The more children support their parents, the higher their sense of happiness.

Zhang Li (2015) conducted a survey on elderly people in institutions and found that good intergenerational relationships can enhance their positive emotions, reduce negative emotions, and thus improve their subjective well-being[3]. Tang Jinquan (2016) explored the impact of intergenerational support on the mental health of elderly people from the perspective of age differences, and found that both receiving and providing intergenerational support have a positive promoting effect on mental health, but the effect varies among different age groups[3]. Zhou Jian et al. (2020) found, based on tracking survey data on factors affecting the health of elderly people nationwide, that the economic support of parents for their children has a significant positive impact on their life satisfaction, while the emotional support of children for their parents also has a positive impact, but the impact of economic support is not significant[3].

In summary, previous studies have focused more on the impact of intergenerational support on the life satisfaction or subjective well-being of the elderly population, with relatively less attention paid to their social participation. In addition, due to the age of the data and limited selection of intergenerational support variables, existing research may not fully reflect the actual impact of current intergenerational support on the mental health status of the elderly population[3]. Therefore, it is necessary to further update the data and research methods to more accurately explore the impact of intergenerational support on social participation and mental health of the elderly population[3].

3. Data, Variables, and Model Settings

3.1. Data and Variable Selection

Table 1. Variable List and Descriptive Statistics

variable	Variable Value	Observations	mean value	standard deviation	minimum value	maximum value
social participation	0: No social participation; 1: Social participation	19816	0.45	0.50	0	1
Financial support for children	0: Not receiving financial support from children; 1: Accepting financial support from children	19816	0.74	0.44	0	1
Gender	0: Female; 1: Male	19816	0.47	0.50	0	1
Education level	0: Educated; 1: Illiteracy	19816	0.24	0.43	0	1
marital status	0: Unmarried; 1: Married	19816	0.78	0.41	0	1
Household registration	0: Non agricultural household registration; 1: Agricultural household registration	19816	0.7	0.46	0	1
Household income	Unit: Yuan	14162	49843	360000	2900000	3.9E+07
Household expenses	Unit: Yuan	16491	48297	90707	0	4800000
Taking care of grandchildren	0: Not taking care of grandchildren; 1: Taking care of grandchildren	19816	0.4	0.49	0	1
Participate in or receive pension	0: Not participating in or receiving pension; 1: Participate in or receive pension	19816	0.37	0.48	0	1
Age	1: 45 to 49 years old; 2: 50-54 Year old; 3: 55-59 years old; 4: 60-64 years old; 5: 65-69 years old; 6: 70-74 years old; 7: 75 years old and above	19816	3.82	1.93	0	7

The data used in this study was sourced from the 2018 China Health and Retirement Tracking Survey (CHARLS)

A nationwide survey covering 18 databases, 8579 variables, and 267508 observations[5]. After rigorous research content

screening, 18310 observation subjects were ultimately selected as the samples for this study.

The focus of this study is on the variable of social participation. In order to comprehensively and accurately

measure the process of social participation.

We conducted an in-depth analysis of the 12 questions in the questionnaire regarding whether specific social activities were conducted within the past month. These issues cover multiple aspects, such as social networking, cultural activities, volunteer services, health exercise, education and training, financial investment, and internet usage[6]. We have organized the answers to these 12 questions, A new variable has been generated. For the first 11 questions related to social activities, if the respondents answer "yes", a value of 1 is assigned, indicating that they have participated in the corresponding social activities; If the answer is "no", assign a value of 0.

In addition, we also paid special attention to the important variable of children's economic support. By asking the respondents about the financial support they received from their children in the past year, we divided the elderly into two groups: those who received financial support from their children and those who did not. In addition to financial support from children, the social participation of elderly people may also be influenced by various other factors. Therefore, based on the reference to the Grossman model, we also included 10 variables as control variables, including age, gender, education level, marital status, household registration location, total household expenditure, intergenerational care, pension situation, and total annual household income, to comprehensively analyze the influencing factors of social participation[1]. Specific variable information is detailed in Table 1.

3.2. Descriptive Statistics

After preliminary statistical analysis of the sample data, we have obtained the following results: the average age of the entire sample is 58 years old. In terms of gender distribution,

males account for 47% and females account for 53%. In terms of marital status, married respondents accounted for the majority, reaching 78%, while unmarried respondents accounted for 22%. In terms of education level, 76% of respondents have a certain educational background. In terms of household registration types, 30% of respondents have non agricultural household registration and 70% have agricultural household registration [7].

In addition, regarding family responsibilities and intergenerational support, 40% of respondents are responsible for taking care of their grandchildren. At the economic level, 74% of respondents received financial support from their children. 45% of respondents participated in social and economic activities. As for the pension situation, 37% of the respondents are receiving or participating in the pension plan. Finally, from an economic perspective, the average annual income of households in the entire sample is 49842.94 yuan.

3.3. Model Settings

Due to the fact that the dependent variable belongs to a binary discrete dependent variable, the Probit model is used for estimation. The model format is set as follows:

$$Y_n = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot Z_1 + \beta_2 \cdot Z_2 + \beta_3 \cdot Z_3 + \dots + \beta_i \cdot Z_i \quad (1)$$

Where Y represents the dependent variable, represents the social participation status of the elderly, and Z represents the explanatory variable, including children providing economic support, caring for grandchildren, age, gender, education level, marital status, household registration location, household income, household expenditure, participation or receipt of pension, etc. β Represents the coefficient to be estimated. During the regression process of the model, household annual income and expenditure have been logarithmically processed.

4. Empirical Results and Analysis

Table 2. Summary of Regression Results

social participation	coefficient	standard Difference	z	P> z	[95% conf. interval]
Children's financial support hold	0.1596	0.0286	5.59	0.000	0.1037 0.2156
Total household expenditure	0.0925	0.0135	6.85	0.000	0.0660 0.1190
Taking care of grandchildren	0.0622	0.0243	2.56	0.010	0.0146 0.1098
Gender	-0.1086	0.0245	-4.44	0.000	-0.1565 -0.0606
Education level	-0.2566	0.0308	-8.33	0.000	-0.3170 -0.1963
marriage	-0.0545	0.0305	-1.79	0.074	-0.1142 0.0052
Household registration	-0.2141	0.0283	-7.57	0.000	-0.2695 -0.1587
Whether to receive retirement benefits or not	-0.0275	0.0309	-0.89	0.374	-0.0881 0.0331
Age	-0.0134	0.0075	-1.77	0.077	-0.0281 0.0014
Total household income	0.0452	0.0094	4.820	0.000	0.0268 0.0636
_cons	-1.3054	0.1543	-8.46	0.000	-1.6079 -1.0030

4.1. The Impact of Children's Economic Support on the Social Participation of the Elderly

This section examines the social participation of all samples and uses the Probit model for regression. The main results of the regression are as follows:

Firstly, the impact of children's economic support on the social participation of the elderly is positive and significant at the 5% level[8].

Secondly, total household expenditure and total household income will have a significant positive impact on the social participation of the elderly. At a significant level of 5%, total household expenses have a greater impact on the social participation of elderly people than total household income.

Thirdly, caring for grandchildren can also have a significant positive impact on the social participation of the elderly.

Fourthly, gender, education level, marital status, household registration location, whether receiving pension, and age have a negative impact on the social participation of the elderly.

The influence of marital status, pension status, and age is not significant[1]. At a significant level of 5%, men are 10.86% less likely than women to have better social participation; At a significance level of 5%, we found that the social participation rate of uneducated elderly people decreased by 25.66% compared to educated elderly people. Compared with unmarried elderly people, the likelihood of social participation among married elderly people decreased by 5.45% at the same significant level[1]. Further comparison reveals that at a significance level of 5%, the probability of social participation among elderly people with agricultural household registration is 21.41% lower than that of elderly people with non-agricultural household registration. In addition, the study also found that elderly people who usually participate in or receive pensions are 2% more likely to participate in society at a significance level of 5% compared to elderly people who do not participate or do not receive pensions.

4.2. Further Analysis of Research Results

The above regression obtained an important conclusion: under the premise of controlling for other variables related to elderly social participation, children's economic support has a significant positive impact on the social participation status of elderly people. The reasons for this result are multifaceted:

Firstly, economic security: Children's financial support can

provide elderly people with a sense of economic security, so that they do not have to worry about basic living expenses, and thus have more time and energy to participate in social activities.

Secondly, social identity: Children's economic support can provide general or individual support to the elderly, increase their social identity, and make them feel that their existence is valuable.

Thirdly, self-confidence: By receiving financial support from their children, elderly people can feel socially important and their status in society is recognized, which helps to increase their confidence and self-esteem.

Fourthly, social opportunities: Children's financial support can provide more social opportunities for the elderly, participate in social activities and communicate with friends, which helps maintain mental health and quality of life.

Fifth, health status: Economic support can promote the health of elderly people, enabling them to have more funds to purchase health care products and services, thereby maintaining physical health and a positive attitude, and enhancing their ability to participate in social activities[10].

5. Heterogeneity Analysis

5.1. Heterogeneity Testing of Gender and Household Registration

Table 3. Heterogeneity Analysis Results: Grouped by Gender and Household Registration Type

variable	woman	masculine	Non agricultural household registration	Agricultural household registration
Financial support for children	0.0147	-0.0242*	0.00511	0.0271**
R ²	0.000166	0.000464	0.0000246	0.000511
sample size	10475	9341	5889	13927

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

According to the test results in Table 3, it can be seen that:

Firstly, financial support from children has a significant negative impact on the social participation of elderly men, while it has a positive impact on women but is not significant. The reasons may include: 1) For elderly men, receiving financial support from their children may reduce their self-esteem and independence, leading to a decrease in their enthusiasm for social participation. Male elderly people are more inclined to maintain their dignity and independence, and they may not be willing to accept assistance from their children, believing that it will lower their social status and sense of honor for elderly women, receiving financial support from their children may increase their opportunities for social participation, especially for those with financially disadvantaged families. Female elderly people tend to pay more attention to family and community affairs, and they may use the economic support they receive to support their social participation activities, improve their social status and sense of identity. The differences in the external social environment may also affect the attitudes and reactions of elderly men and women towards receiving financial support from their children. In some cultural traditions, male elderly people are believed to be self-sufficient and not dependent on the support of their children, while female elderly people are seen as the center and pillar of the family, requiring the care and help of their children. This cultural tradition may affect the acceptance attitude and behavioral performance of elderly people.

Secondly, children's economic support has a significant

positive impact on the social participation of rural elderly people, while it has a positive impact on urban elderly people but is not significant. The reason may be that: 2) The economic situation of elderly people in rural areas is relatively poor, and the social security system is relatively incomplete[11]. Therefore, financial support for children can help them meet their daily needs to reduce life stress, it is necessary to be more likely to participate in social activities, enhance one's sense of self-worth and social identity. The economic conditions of urban elderly people are relatively good, the social security system is relatively complete, and they require less economic support from their children to live, which may not result in significant social participation effects. Rural communities are relatively closed, social relationships are closer, and the importance of social capital is more prominent. By providing financial support to children, they can gain more social capital, such as more connections and social opportunities, which can better participate in social activities in rural communities, enhance social status and influence. In urban communities, interpersonal relationships become more distant, and the role of social capital is limited. Therefore, even if children receive economic support, it may not necessarily bring more social participation effects. Rural elderly people view their families and communities as a whole and pay more attention to family and community affairs. Financial support for children can not only help them solve daily life problems, but also help them better support the development of their families and communities, enhance their sense of identification and belonging to society. Urban

elderly people pay more attention to personal affairs and interests, and their children's economic support has a relatively small impact on their social participation.

5.2. Heterogeneity Testing for Caring for Grandchildren

Table 4. Heterogeneity Analysis Results: Grouped by Whether or Not to Care for Grandchildren

variable	Not taking care of grandchildren	Financial support for caring for
grandchildren and children	-0.0239*	0.0243
R ²	0.000476	0.000418
sample size	11834	7982

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

According to the test results in Table 4, it can be seen that:

The economic support of children has a significant negative impact on the social participation of elderly people who do not take care of their grandchildren, while the positive impact on elderly people who take care of their grandchildren is not significant. The reason may be that elderly people who take care of their grandchildren are already in a relatively active state of social participation, so the impact of their children's economic support on them is not significant. For elderly people who have not taken care of their grandchildren, due to the lack of tasks to take care of them, they may be more prone to withdrawal, loneliness, and depression, which are difficult to compensate for with their children's financial support. In addition, studies have shown that excessive financial support from children may make older adults overly dependent on their children, weakening their sense of self-worth and willingness to participate in society.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study found that children's economic support has a significant positive impact on the social participation of the elderly, and this result still holds true after endogeneity and robustness tests. In addition, there is heterogeneity in the impact of children's economic support on the social participation of the elderly[12]. 2) From a gender perspective, economic support from children has a significant negative impact on the social participation of elderly men, while it has a positive impact on women but is not significant. From the perspective of urban and rural areas, children's economic support has a significant positive impact on the social participation of rural elderly people, while it has a positive impact on urban elderly people but is not significant. In addition, the heterogeneity analysis of whether or not to take care of grandchildren shows that children's economic support has a significant negative impact on the social participation of elderly people who do not take care of grandchildren, while the positive impact on elderly people who take care of grandchildren is not significant.

Based on the above conclusions, this article proposes the following countermeasures and suggestions:

Firstly, encourage male elderly people to actively participate in social activities and enhance their awareness of social activities. It is recommended that elderly men participate in more social volunteer activities to promote physical and mental health and enhance social skills. In the family, try to avoid excessive dependence on children. At the same time, we should encourage elderly people to actively

participate in family affairs, share household chores reasonably, and not place all economic and life responsibilities solely on their children.

Secondly, strengthen the social support system for elderly people in rural areas. Suggest relevant departments and social organizations to strengthen their care and care for elderly people in rural areas, increase social support, and provide more public facilities and welfare services, such as elderly activity centers, nursing homes, medical institutions, etc [13]. Improving the material living conditions of elderly people in rural areas is also one of the necessary measures. Suggest increasing economic security measures for rural elderly people, such as increasing pensions, subsidizing their living expenses, etc., so that their economic conditions can meet their living needs. At the same time, attention should also be paid to the social needs of urban elderly people. Provide more social venues and activities for the elderly, such as senior clubs, community activity centers, etc., so that they can enjoy more social and cultural life.

Firstly, for elderly people who have not taken care of their grandchildren, society should provide more support and assistance to increase their social participation. For example, the government and social organizations can provide more community activities, volunteer activities and cultural courses for the elderly, so that they can better integrate into social life. For elderly people who take care of their grandchildren, they should pay more attention to their economic and mental health. The government can provide more social security and medical resources to support their long-term care needs. In addition, society should also provide more psychological counseling and support to help them cope with the pressure and challenges of caring for their grandchildren. In short, targeted policies and measures need to be formulated for different groups of elderly people to meet their different needs, improve their social participation and quality of life.

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