

Health Status of the Chinese Elderly: A Relationship between Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics

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Introduction

- ❖ Research on the physical health of the Chinese elderly is very rare.
- ❖ Studying the health status among the frail aged population becomes increasingly important because the country has the world's largest elderly population, numbering 178 million in 2011.
- ❖ What are the common diseases among the Chinese elderly? How do they perceive their health status? Do their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics have an impact on their perceived health?
- ❖ These questions are a concern for social researchers as well as government officers and policy makers.

Theory and Literature

The following perspectives are used as theoretical grounds to interpret the variation of the diseases, the dispersion of the socioeconomic characteristics among the elderly, and the linkages between the dependent and independent variables under this study.

- ❖ **Epidemiological Transition**
 - Shift from infectious disease at young ages to chronic disease at old ages
 - Elderly tend to live longer with degenerative diseases
- ❖ **Third Age and Fourth Age Framework**
 - 3rd Age - Early stages of retirement; Still physically capable of performing most day to day activities
 - 4th Age - Increasing chronic illness and disability; Disheartening factor because of the expectation that he/she will develop a life changing problem
- ❖ **Activity Theory**
 - One must be socially active in terms of one's social roles in order to be satisfied as an older person
 - Active lifestyle can reduce potential chronic illness
- ❖ **Continuity Theory**
 - Continuation of activity is linked to an individual's past in that staying physically healthy are characteristics of a person's social circumstances

Hypotheses

1. **Diseases among the Chinese elderly vary.**
2. **Socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the Chinese elderly vary.**
3. **Health status perceived by the Chinese elderly is associated with their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.**

Research Methods

The data comes from a survey conducted by the China Research Center of Aging in 2006, and has a sample size of 1,980.

There are 11 variables associated with health status, which is the dependent variable, making demographic and socioeconomic characteristics independent variables.

Frequency distribution, Chi-square, and measures of association are the primary statistical methods used in this study. Analysis will be conducted to show the variation among diseases and the strength of the associations between perceived health status and the independent variables of the Chinese elderly.

Association between Health Status and Economic Security

Cross Tabulation: The Impact of Socioeconomic Characteristics on Perceived Health (%)

Economy Security	No	Yes	Total
Health Status			
Very Poor	81(11.8)	47(3.6)	128(6.5)
Poor	191(27.8)	189(14.7)	380(19.2)
Average	303(44.1)	657(51.0)	960(48.6)
Good	97(14.1)	329(25.5)	426(21.6)
Better	15(2.2)	66(5.1)	81(4.1)
Total	687(100.0)	1288(100.0)	1975(100.0)

Chi Square = 126.902; df = 4; p < .001; Cramer's V = .253

Findings

- ❖ **Common Diseases Among the Chinese Elderly**
 - Stroke, Heart Disease, Diabetes, Arthritis, Hypertension, Cerebrovascular Disease, Bronchitis, Kidney Disease, Tuberculosis, Liver Disease, Dermatitis, Glaucoma
- ❖ **Variation of Socioeconomic and Demographic variables**
 - The percentages of elderly Chinese that went to college versus elementary differ greatly, 7.1% versus 59.7%.
- ❖ **Socioeconomic Variables Are Associated with Perceived Health Status**
 - The relationships between health status and all independent variables are significant except for education.
 - Example: State Medical Care
 - Elderly who receive state medical care tend to report their health status as positive
 - Chi-square=9.55; df=4; p < .05; Cramer's V = .098
 - Education did not have a significant relationship with perceived health status
 - Literature justification: People with low educational attainment do not expect high levels of health compared to people with higher education
- ❖ **Demographic Variables Are Associated with Perceived Health Status**
 - All demographic variables show statistically significant relationships with health status.
 - Children's filial piety, not the quantity of children, plays a significant role toward the elderly's perception of their health status.

Discussion

- ❖ The findings were largely consistent with literature and theories.
- ❖ Negative reported health status was consistently found among women, rural residents, and oldest old categories.
- ❖ Policy Implications
 - Government should address disparity issues regarding residency and gender issues. Policies should revolve around more vulnerable populations.