

CHINESE ELDERLY STUDIES

AN ANALYSIS ON THE DAILY ACTIVITIES AND THEIR ASSOCIATIONS OF THE CHINESE ELDERLY

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ABSTRACT

Using data from a national survey conducted by the China Research Center on Aging (CRCA) in 2006, this study seeks to examine the relationship between the ability of the Chinese elderly to perform the Activities of Daily Living (ADL) which includes cooking, eating, walking, toileting, getting-in and getting-out of bed, bathing and dressing independently, in regards to their demographic location; gender, socioeconomic status and other psychological factors. By utilizing cross-classification and the chi-square significance test, the findings show support for the main hypothesis. Issues concerning the elderly and policy repercussions are discussed.

IMPORTANCE OF TOPIC

Research regarding the ADL among the Chinese elderly is very limited (Ji and Turner, 2010). Research examining the ability of Chinese elderly to perform activities of daily living (ADL) and questions regarding the statuses of the daily activities of the elderly in terms of demographic location, gender, socioeconomic and psychological factors are seldom researched. This study can help us better understand the Chinese elderly's ability to carry out the activities of daily living which may assist in bringing awareness to governmental agencies and policy makers to address issues in their future policy-making processes.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Our research focused on four main theoretical perspectives to aide in developing our hypotheses. Aging theory, resources theory, continuity theory, and gender theory were the four theories that we focused on.

AGING THEORY

Suggests that as a population ages, people's health status will undergo gradual and unfavorable changes in multiple aspects (Henslin, 2009) such as genetic changes in DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), biological changes in strength and vitality, psychological changes in memory and emotions, sociological changes in roles and status, political changes in power and conflict, and so on. These changes throughout the life course play a determining role in the Chinese elderly's ability to perform ADL.

RESOURCES THEORY

Suggests that as people age, their social resources decline which in turn affects the way in which they are able to carry out their daily activities as they may have in the past. Due to the diminishment of family support as the traditional way of caring for the elderly, many Chinese elderly have had to learn to take care of themselves. However, the Chinese elderly's self-care abilities are greatly challenged by the high prevalence of chronic illness and a lack of financial resources.

CONTINUITY THEORY

Suggests that in terms of normal aging, older adults will usually maintain the same activities, behaviors, and relationships that they did in their earlier years of life (Feldman, 1999). Those who carried out more active lifestyles throughout their lifetime are much more likely to remain active in their elderly years.

GENDER THEORY

Explains how individuals become gendered in society, and how sex-linked characteristics are maintained and transmitted to other members of a culture (Wong, 2014). It is shown that gender plays a determining role in the ability and likelihood of Chinese elderly performing activities of daily living. Women have longer life expectancies than men. However, they statistically have more health problems at any given age. Therefore, women have lower mortality, but higher morbidity than men (Case and Paxson, 2004).

LITERATURE REVIEW

From the review of the literature, it can be seen that there are three core features of successful aging in China: financial support, assistance with ADLs, and psychological well-being. Family members are the main source of physical, emotional, social, psychological, and financial support for older Chinese (Wan, Honwei, Fang Yu, and Kolanowski, 2008). Elderly people who perceive their friends and family members as supportive during times of need have a stronger sense of meaning in their lives; that is, they live their lives with a broader purpose, adhering to a value system that fits within the larger social world (Krause, 2007). In addition, elderly with strong social networks report greater emotional well-being in day-to-day life and also when they experience stressful life events (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND

HYPOTHESES

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

After reviewing the literature and discussing theoretical perspectives, we concluded that our research would revolve around **two main research questions**:

First, we questioned if the Chinese elderly have any difficulties performing the activities of daily living such as cooking, eating, walking indoors, toileting, getting-in and getting-out of bed, bathing, using phones and dressing independently. Secondly, we questioned if socioeconomic and psychological factors play a role in the ability to perform these daily activities.

HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1: Inferred from the literature and theories, it is hypothesized that the Chinese elderly's ability to perform the ADL, which include cooking, dressing, toileting, bathing, walking, eating, and getting in and out of bed are correlated with their social economic characteristics, age, gender, marital status, region, health status, economic security and life satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Inferred from both the literature and theory, it is hypothesized that the differences seen in the ability of the Chinese elderly's ability to perform the ADL, which include cooking, dressing, toileting, bathing, walking, eating, and getting in and out of bed, are associated with their social economic characteristics of age, gender, marital status, region, health status, economic security, and life satisfaction.

METHODS AND ANALYSIS

DATA SOURCE

Our data source came from a nationwide survey collected by the China Research Center on Aging (CRCA, 2006). The population of the survey consisted of 19,800 urban and rural Chinese elderly individuals, aged 60 and above. The survey was administered over sixteen provinces, two central government municipalities, and two autonomous regions. Our sample was based on 10% of the total surveyed Chinese elderly individuals, for a **total sample size of 1,980 individuals**. The information from the survey included demographic characteristics, economic statuses, social characteristics, social welfare information, living arrangements and the psychological well being of the Chinese elderly.

VARIABLES

We had a total of 20 variables; 8 of which served as our dependent variables and represented the activities of daily living, while the other 12 served as our independent variables. These are outlined in the table below.

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables (Nominal)	Independent Variables (Ordinal)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cooking• Eating• Toileting• Washing• Walking Indoors• Getting In and Out of Bed• Dressing Self• Using Phones	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gender• Marital Status• Region• Chronic Illness• Basic Medical Insurance• Healthy Exercise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Age• Residence• Economic Perception• Health Status• Filial Piety

*All dependent variables are ordinal and measured by a three-scale indicator where:
1) Unable 2) Partially Able 3) Able

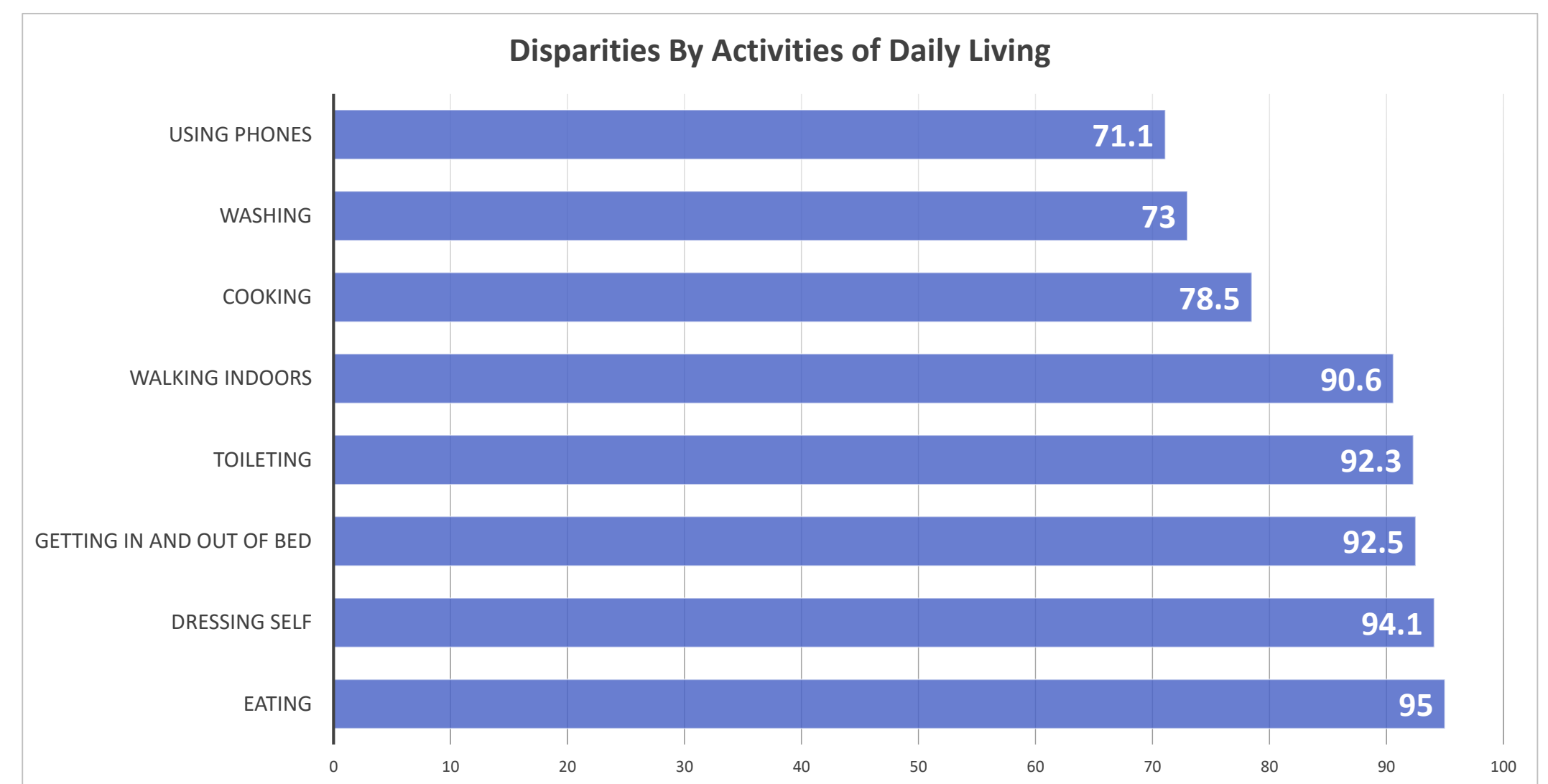
STATISTICAL METHODS

To answer the underlying questions and test the hypotheses, the statistical methods used were:

- Frequency distribution
- Correlation matrix
- Cross-tabulation
- Chi-square significance test
- Measures of Cramer's V
- Both Kendall's tau-b and tau-c

FINDINGS

From the results regarding the ADLs, it is demonstrated that the majority of the elderly are able to perform these activities. The table below represents the entire sampled respondents and what percentage of them were able to perform the eight daily activities that we studied. What the results below suggested is that activities that require higher amounts of mobility are more difficult for the elderly to perform.



EFFECT OF AGE AND GENDER ON ADL

The directionality of the association between age and the ADL shows to be negative, which suggests that the older the elderly become, the less able the elderly are to perform their daily activities. These findings are expected, and they are consistent with both theory and literature. The results for gender show no statistically significant relationships for all ADL. The percentages across male and female categories also show little difference. This suggests that being a male or female has no effect on the ability in which certain tasks are performed as an elder. This goes against both the literature review and gender theory.

EFFECT OF MARITAL STATUS, RESIDENCE AND REGION ON ADL

Five out of the eight activities show statistically significant effects from marital status; these include cooking, toileting, washing, walking indoors, and using phones. Three out of the eight activities were unaffected by residence, but four of the eight variables were statistically significant at a level of $p < .01$. These activities were cooking, eating, washing, and using phones. The variables of region and residence had very similar effects on the activities of the elderly, with four of the eight activities showing no association with region of China.

EFFECTS OF HEALTH STATUS, CHRONIC ILLNESS AND HEALTHY EXERCISE ON THE ADL

The health status of the Chinese elderly is found to be a significant factor in relation to the ability to perform daily activities. These findings are consistent with both theory and literature—the healthier the elderly are, or believe that they are, the greater their ability will be to perform even the most basic tasks. In contrast to the role the health status and chronic illness plays in their respective relationships with the daily activities of the elderly, whether the elderly exercise regularly or not did not appear to have a significant relationship with the activities.

EFFECT OF MEDICAL INSURANCE AND ECONOMIC PERCEPTION

The results show consistent patterns that elderly who perceived their economic situation as sufficient, were able to perform tasks at higher percentages than those who perceived their economic situation as difficult. In contrast to economic perception, the results of the study showed that five out of the eight activities were unaffected by the medical insurance variable, which indicated whether or not the individual was under a medical insurance plan.

EFFECT OF RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION AND FILIAL PIETY

The results show that the demographic variable of religious affiliation only has an effect on three of the eight activities of the elderly, with these activities being getting in and out of bed, dressing self, and using phones. Similarly, the results for the study show that the daily activities of the elderly are largely unaffected by filial piety of children. Seven of the eight activities show no statistical significance with filial piety.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study make it clear, along with the theories and the literature, that the daily routine, life satisfaction, and activities performed, is directly associated with the aging process seen in the Chinese elderly. With 220 million elderly Chinese currently, and a predicted population growth, doubling to 440 million over the next 33 years until 2050 (United Nations, 1999), the well-being of this population in terms of the ability to perform daily activities, and the discrepancies within the population itself should be of importance to China's government in terms of policy implications, families, and social researchers.