

An Analysis on the Life Satisfaction of the Chinese Elderly

Janet Bebo and Dr. Jianjun Ji Department of Sociology

University of Wisconsin
Eau Claire

Abstract:

Utilizing China's national survey on the elderly population in 2016, this study examines the perceptions on life satisfaction of the Chinese elderly. Supported by theoretical perspectives, this study is to test the hypothesis that life satisfaction of the Chinese elderly is associated with their 1) demographic characteristics, 2) economic characteristics, 3) social characteristics, 4) social resources, and 5) psychological wellbeing, by controlling for eight out of twenty-two variables involved in the total analysis. Given the levels of measurement of the variables under study and the purpose of the research hypothesis, the statistical methods applied in this analysis included Chi-square significant test, Pearson correlation, both Zero and first-order table cross-tabulations, and Multiple Linear Regression. Measures of strength such as Cramer's V and Kendall's Tau-b and Tau-c were also included. The results, by and large, show robust support to the underlying hypothesis.

Theoretical Perspectives:

Four theories are used for this study. Modernization Theory argues that as the society gets more urbanized, the status of the elderly will decline. Theory of Stratification implies that people in older age layer opt to having unfavorable location in terms of social benefits and privileges. Theory of Social Resources holds the view that after retirement, the elderly population's social resources tend to decrease in time, along with their social status. Conflict Perspective states that the old generation as a social group, their ability for competing for scarce social resources such as power, prestige, and wealth will decline. As a result, the overall social environment will be unfavorable to them. The above theories are used as theoretical grounds to develop and guide the research hypotheses.

Hypotheses:

H1: Based on the theoretical perspectives and literature, perception on Life satisfaction will vary among the Chinese elderly.

H2: Perception on life satisfaction of the Chinese elderly is associated with their demographic, economic, and social characteristics, controlling for the effect of Region, Fertility, and Economic Perception.

H3: Perception on life satisfaction of the Chinese elderly is associated with their social resources, controlling for the effect of Economic Perception.

H4: Perception on life satisfaction of the Chinese elderly is associated with psychological wellbeing, controlling for the effects of Fertility, Gender, Marital Status and Age Groups.

Methods

Data: This study uses data from a nationwide survey collected by the China Research Center on Aging in 2006 (CRCA). The respondents were from 16 provinces, two central government municipalities, and two autonomous regions in China. The survey was conducted from 19,800 urban and rural elderly aged 60 years and above. This study, however, only uses a 10% of the sample respondents from the survey, making our sample size at 1,980.

Measures: There are 22 variables in total: 1 dependent, 21 independent, and 8 control variables. The Dependent: Life Satisfaction, defined as - "Personal perception on life satisfaction on the part of the elderly individuals." It is an ordinal variable measured by a five-scale-indicator:

Very unsatisfied
Unsatisfied
Average
Satisfied
Very Satisfied

The independent variables are categorized into five groups: 1) Demographic Characteristics: gender, age, marital status, fertility; 2) Economic Characteristics: pension, saving, kid support, economic perception; 3) Social Characteristics: education, religion, region, ethnicity; 4) Social Resources: medical insurance, own room, daily assistant, final say; 5) Psychological Wellbeing: filial piety, health status, feel lonely, feel old, family harmony.

Statistics: Since these variables under study are nominal, ordinal, and interval in nature, the appropriate methods for statistical analysis are confined to Cross- tabulations based Zero-Order and First Order tables, Chi-Square Significant test, and Cramer's V, Kendall's Tau-b, and Kendall's Tau-c for strength test.

Below is one of the Tables we used. This one is examining the relationship between ones gender and their perceived life satisfaction

$\chi^2=5.710$; $df=4$; $p<.222$; Cramer's $V=.054$

Gender	Male	Female	Total
Life Satisfaction			
Very Unsatisfied	50(4.9)	41(4.3)	91(4.6)
Unsatisfied	73(7.2)	71(7.4)	144(7.3)
Average	368(36.4)	389(40.1)	764(38.7)
Satisfied	435(43.0)	386(40.1)	821(41.6)
Very Satisfied	86(8.5)	68(7.1)	154(7.8)
Total	1012(100.0)	962(100.0)	1974(100.0)

Results:

H1: "Perception on life satisfaction will vary among the Chinese elderly" is supported. Of 1974 respondents, 41.6% satisfied, 7.8% very satisfied, 4.6% and 7.3% reported very unsatisfied and satisfied, while 38.7% responded as "Average."

H2: Results show that, controlling for REGIONS and FERTILITY, the associations b/w life satisfaction and demographic, economic, and social characteristics are statistically significant, though the strengths vary and weak.

H3: Results show that, controlling for ECONOMIC PERCEPTION, the associations b/w life satisfaction and social resources, are all statistically significant - $p < 0.05$; or $p < 0.001$. the strengths vary and weak.

H4: Results show that, controlling for Fertility, Gender, Marital Status, Age Group, the associations b/w life satisfaction and psychological wellbeing, are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. The strengths show relative stronger association compared with previous hypotheses.

Conclusion and Discussion

The results show support to all hypotheses, holding control variables constant, though the strengths between life satisfaction and variables of the five categories vary, weak, and moderate. It should be stressed that of the five categories of the independent variables, psychological wellbeing demonstrates the most robust strength with life satisfaction. This suggests that the Chinese elderly tend to put more weight on psychological wellbeing in relationship with their life satisfaction, suggesting that, once material support is available, psychological factors such as children's filial piety, family harmonious relationships, health status, feeling lonely or old, are becoming more meaningful and important to the elderly Chinese population. Since this analysis is based on a cross-sectional data, the statistical methods had to be confined to association test. Any cause-effect relationships are unable to establish.