



Article

Does Social Support Affect the Health of the Elderly in Rural China? A Meta-Analysis Approach

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Abstract: As the trend of aging in rural China has intensified, research on the factors affecting the health of the elderly in rural areas has become a hot issue. However, the conclusions of existing studies are inconsistent and even contradictory, making it difficult to form constructive policies with practical value. To explore the reasons for the inconsistent conclusions drawn by relevant research, in this paper we constructed a meta-regression database based on 65 pieces of relevant literature published in the past 25 years. For more valid samples to reduce publication bias, we also set the statistical significance of social support to the health of the elderly in rural areas as a dependent variable. Finally, combined with multi-dimensional social support and its implications for the health of the elderly, meta-regression analysis was carried out on the results of 171 empirical studies. The results show that (1) subjective support rather than objective support can have a significant impact on the health of the elderly in rural areas, and there is no significant difference between other dimensions of social support and objective support; (2) the health status of the elderly in rural areas in samples involving western regions is more sensitive to social support than that in samples not involving the western regions; (3) among the elderly in rural areas, social support for the older male elderly is more likely to improve their health than that for the younger female elderly; and (4) besides this, both data sources and econometric models greatly affect the heterogeneity of the effect of social support on the health of the elderly in rural areas, but neither the published year nor the journal is significant. Finally, relevant policies and follow-up studies on the impact of social support on the health of the elderly in rural areas are discussed.

Keywords: health of the elderly in rural areas; social support; influencing factors; meta-analysis; China