



## A Study on the Factors Influencing the Happiness of Rural Elderly

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between social support and life satisfaction among 200 rural elderly individuals using the "Social Support Rating Scale" and the "Life Satisfaction Rating Scale." Through independent sample t-tests and correlation analysis, the results revealed significant differences in subjective support across dimensions such as age, economic status, and marital status. Objective support also showed significant variations in gender, age, economic status, and marital status. The utilization of support differed significantly by age. Additionally, life satisfaction among rural elderly exhibited notable differences in gender, age, economic status, and marital status. Significant positive correlations were found between all dimensions of social support (and total scores) and life satisfaction. The findings suggest that enhancing psychological care and social support for rural elderly can improve their life satisfaction.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to data from the China National Committee on Aging, the rural elderly population aged 60 and above in China is projected to exceed 400 million by 2037, peaking at 500 million by 2051. The United Nations predicts that China will account for one-fifth of the global rural elderly population in the first half of the 21st century. This demographic shift is driven by increased life expectancy, declining birth rates, and urban migration, which has significantly altered family structures and support systems.

With the rapid increase in "empty-nest" households, where elderly individuals live alone or only with their spouse due to adult children migrating to urban areas for work, and the decline of traditional multi-generational families, life satisfaction has become a critical indicator for evaluating the quality of life and subjective well-being among the elderly. Studies have shown that rural elderly populations face higher risks of social isolation, economic insecurity, and health deterioration compared to their urban counterparts. The lack of adequate healthcare services, pension coverage, and community-based support exacerbates these challenges, making social support a vital factor in their overall well-being.

Social support, encompassing emotional, instrumental, and informational support, has been widely recognized as a key determinant of physical health, mental well-being, and social functioning among older adults. Strong social networks, including family, friends, and community organizations, can provide emotional stability, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging, which are essential for maintaining life satisfaction. Conversely, a lack of social support is often linked to higher stress levels, increased risk of depression, and lower quality of life.

Given these concerns, this study aims to explore the relationship between social support and life satisfaction among the rural elderly population in China. Through a comprehensive analysis of sociocultural, economic, and policy-related factors, this study seeks to identify key determinants of well-being in aging rural communities and propose actionable recommendations to improve their quality of life. Potential interventions include strengthening community engagement programs, enhancing social welfare policies, and expanding access to healthcare and mental health services tailored to the unique needs of the rural elderly.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Social Support Rating Scale (SSRS)*

Developed by Xiao Shuiyuan in 1986, this 10-item scale measures objective support (3 items), subjective support (4 items), and support utilization (3 items). It has been widely used in domestic and international studies.

### *Introduction to the Life Satisfaction Rating Scale*

The Life Satisfaction Rating Scale (LSR) is a component of the Life Satisfaction Scales (LSS). It is a five-point other-rated scale developed by Gigantean, Chauvinist, & Robin in 1981, with two additional independent subscales: Life Satisfaction Index A and Life Satisfaction Index B. The inter-rater reliability of the LSR was 0.78, and the consistency between LSR scores and

results from comprehensive interviews conducted by clinical psychologists and participants reached 0.64.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Participants*

A random sample of 200 rural elderly individuals from a city was selected, with 76 valid responses. Participant demographics are shown in Table 2-1.

Table 1. The distribution of samples

Gender	Age (60–69 / 70–83)	Economic Status (Yes/No)	Marital Status (Yes/No)
68 M / 86 F	92 / 56	94 / 58	90/62

### *Statistical Analysis*

SPSS 14.0 was used for t-tests, ANOVA, and Pearson correlation analysis.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

### *Analysis of Differences in Social Support Among Rural Elderly*

#### *Gender Differences in Social Support*

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to analyze gender differences in social support dimensions (Table 1).

Table 2. Gender Differences in Social Support  
 The Differences between subscales of social support in gender

Dimension	Male (M±SD)	Female (M±SD)	t-value
Subjective Support	19.88 ± 4.14	19.64 ± 3.90	0.731
Objective Support	6.72 ± 1.76	6.21 ± 1.67	3.681*
Support Utilization	6.81 ± 2.37	7.22 ± 2.20	2.228
Total Score	33.41 ± 5.44	33.07 ± 5.30	0.775

Notes: \*p < 0.01, p < 0.05.

Males scored significantly higher in objective support (p < 0.05). No significant differences were found in subjective support, support utilization, or total scores.

#### *Age Differences in Social Support*

Significant differences were observed between younger (60–69) and older (70–83) groups across all dimensions (Table 3-2).

Table 3. Age Differences in Social Support

Dimension	Younger (M±SD)	Older (M±SD)	t-value
Subjective Support	21.08 ± 4.60	18.34 ± 3.18	5.727*
Objective Support	6.98 ± 1.68	5.99 ± 1.65	4.639*
Support Utilization	7.40 ± 1.35	6.90 ± 2.36	3.684*
Total Score	35.24 ± 5.76	31.47 ± 2.54	5.986*

Significant differences were observed between the younger and older groups in subjective support ( $t=5.727$ ,  $t=5.727$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), objective support ( $t=4.639$ ,  $t=4.639$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), support p ( $t=3.684$ ,  $t=3.684$ ;  $p<0.05$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), and total score ( $t=5.986$ ,  $t=5.986$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), with the younger group scoring higher than the older group across all dimensions.

#### *Economic Status Differences in Social Support*

Participants with income sources reported significantly higher scores in subjective support, objective support, and total scores Table 4.

Table 4. Economic Status Differences in Social Support

Dimension	With Income (M±SD)	Without Income (M±SD)	t-value
Subjective Support	24.48 ± 4.60	22.45 ± 7.19	4.510*
Objective Support	11.04 ± 3.92	7.84 ± 2.88	3.393*
Support Utilization	7.41 ± 1.85	6.67 ± 2.67	2.049
Total Score	42.93 ± 9.44	36.96 ± 12.52	4.631*

Significant differences were found between participants with and without economic sources in subjective support ( $t=4.510$ ,  $t=4.510$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), objective support ( $t=3.393$ ,  $t=3.393$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and total score ( $t=4.631$ ,  $t=4.631$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). However, no significant difference was observed in support utilization ( $t=2.049$ ,  $t=2.049$ ;  $p>0.05$ ,  $p>0.05$ ).

#### *Marital Status Differences in Social Support*

Married participants scored higher in subjective and objective support Table 5.

Table 5. The Differences between subscales of social support in marriage situation

Dimension	Married (M±SD)	Unmarried (M±SD)	t-value
Subjective Support	24.69 ± 4.74	21.76 ± 5.80	3.471*
Objective Support	11.49 ± 3.32	9.78 ± 3.68	3.942*
Support Utilization	7.30 ± 1.95	6.96 ± 2.21	1.235
Total Score	43.47 ± 8.67	38.50 ± 10.56	3.680*

Significant differences existed between married and unmarried participants in subjective support ( $t=3.942$ ,  $t=3.942$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), objective support ( $t=3.471$ ,  $t=3.471$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and total score ( $t=3.680$ ,  $t=3.680$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). No significant difference was found in support utilization ( $t=3.684$ ,  $t=3.684$ ;  $p>0.05$ ,  $p>0.05$ ).

**Analysis of Differences in Life Satisfaction**

*Gender Differences in Life Satisfaction*

Males reported significantly higher life satisfaction than females ( $p < 0.01$ ) Table 6.

Table 6. The Differences of life satisfaction in gender

Dimension	Male (M±SD)	Female (M±SD)	t-value
Life Satisfaction	14.58 ± 3.95	13.72 ± 4.29	3.06*

Males reported significantly higher life satisfaction than females ( $t=3.06$ ,  $t=3.06$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

*Age Differences in Life Satisfaction*

Younger participants scored higher in life satisfaction ( $p < 0.05$ ) Table 7.

Table 7. The Differences of life satisfaction in age

Dimension	Younger (M±SD)	Older (M±SD)	t-value
Life Satisfaction	14.33 ± 3.82	13.72 ± 4.29	2.28*

A significant difference in life satisfaction was observed between younger and older groups ( $t=2.08$ ,  $t=2.08$ ;  $p<0.05$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), with the younger group scoring higher.

*Economic Status Differences in Life Satisfaction*

Participants with income sources reported higher life satisfaction ( $p < 0.01$ ) Table 8.

Table 8. The Differences of life satisfaction in pocketbook

Dimension	With Income (M±SD)	Without Income (M±SD)	t-value
Life Satisfaction	15.66 ± 3.43	12.32 ± 3.87	14.16*

Participants with economic sources had significantly higher life satisfaction than those without ( $t=14.16$ ,  $t=14.16$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

*Marital Status Differences in Life Satisfaction*

Married participants had higher life satisfaction ( $p < 0.01$ ) Table 9.

Table 9. The Differences of life satisfaction in marriage situation

Dimension	Married (M±SD)	Unmarried (M±SD)	t-value
Life Satisfaction	14.88 ± 3.71	12.70 ± 4.15	8.30*

Married participants exhibited significantly higher life satisfaction than unmarried individuals ( $t=8.30$ ,  $t=8.30$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

***Correlation Between Social Support and Life Satisfaction***

Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive correlations between social support dimensions and life satisfaction Table 10.

Table 10. Correlation matrix between social support and life satisfaction

Dimension	Subjective Support	Objective Support	Support Utilization	Total Score
Life	0.256**	0.444**	0.263**	0.412**

Life satisfaction showed significant correlations with subjective support ( $r=0.256$ ,  $r=0.256$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), objective support ( $r=0.444$ ,  $r=0.444$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), support utilization ( $r=0.263$ ,  $r=0.263$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and total social support score ( $r=0.412$ ,  $r=0.412$ ;  $p<0.01$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

**DISCUSSION**

***Analysis of Differences in Social Support and Life Satisfaction***

***Analysis of Differences in Social Support Among Rural Elderly***

The results indicate that social support for rural elderly is associated with gender, age, economic status, and marital status. Gender differences were observed across dimensions of social support. Specifically, males scored significantly higher in objective support than females. This disparity may stem from physiological and sociocultural factors: men's greater physiological dependence and their historical role as dominant societal figures may lead them to seek and receive more objective support. Psychologically, men exhibit stronger dependency traits compared to women, aligning with existing research findings.

Age-related differences were also significant. Younger participants (60–69 years) scored higher in subjective support, objective support, and support utilization than older participants (70–83 years). This may be attributed to better physical health and greater social engagement among younger individuals, which fosters proactive utilization of support. Research corroborates that social activity participation positively correlates with social support levels in rural elderly.

Economic status further influenced social support. Elderly with stable income sources reported higher scores in subjective support, objective support, and total social support. This could reflect heightened psychological sensitivity to societal perceptions of financial status; those without income may internalize stigma, leading to avoidance of external assistance.

Marital status also played a role. Married individuals scored higher in both subjective and objective support, likely due to emotional reliance on spouses and the psychological stability marriage provides. Spousal support constitutes a critical component of social support for rural elderly.

#### *Analysis of Differences in Life Satisfaction*

Life satisfaction among rural elderly varied significantly by gender, age, economic status, and marital status. Males reported higher satisfaction than females, younger groups scored higher than older groups, those with income surpassed those without, and married individuals exceeded unmarried counterparts. Potential explanations include:

- Gender: Men may have stronger self-actualization motives and higher self-expectations.
- Age: Older adults' pessimistic assessments of declining health may lower satisfaction.
- Economic status: Financial stability fosters optimism and reduces material concerns.
- Marital status: Married individuals exhibit greater social warmth and communication skills, enhancing positive societal engagement.

#### *Relationship Between Social Support and Life Satisfaction*

Social support and life satisfaction are significantly correlated, with variations tied to gender, age, economic status, and marital status. Males and younger individuals, who engage more actively in social activities, tend to have higher life expectations and satisfaction. Studies by Li Deming et al. [18] highlight that rural elderly primarily rely on support from children, followed by spouses

and neighbors. Limited support networks, especially for unmarried individuals, exacerbate emotional isolation, reducing life satisfaction. Societal biases (e.g., favoring wealth) may also deter help-seeking behaviors, intensifying loneliness and dissatisfaction.

## CONCLUSION

1. Social support significantly differs by age, economic status, and marital status.
2. Life satisfaction varies across gender, age, economic status, and marital status.
3. Social support and life satisfaction are strongly correlated.

## RECOMMENDATION

1. Self-awareness: Encourage rural elderly to adopt positive attitudes toward aging, embrace life changes, and cultivate resilience against adversity.
2. Family support: Shift from material-focused "filial piety" to emotional engagement. Children should prioritize regular communication, discuss topics relevant to elderly concerns, and share societal updates, rather than limiting interaction to holidays.
3. Community development: Strengthen social networks through culturally appropriate activities (e.g., festivals, sports, health education) and create re-employment opportunities. Communities must address the social isolation of retirees by fostering inclusive environments.

## ADVANCED RESEARCH

1. Self-awareness: Encourage rural elderly to adopt positive attitudes toward aging, embrace life changes, and cultivate resilience against adversity.
2. Family support: Shift from material-focused "filial piety" to emotional engagement. Children should prioritize regular communication, discuss topics relevant to elderly concerns, and share societal updates, rather than limiting interaction to holidays.
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