

# Investigation on the Self-supporting Ability of the Elderly in Community

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**Abstract.** Objective: To investigate the current status of self-supporting ability of the elderly in community, and compare the elderly people's self-supporting ability on the basis of different demographic characteristics. Methods: General demographic characteristics scale and self-supporting ability for elderly people were used to investigate 316 elderly people. Results: The total score of self-supporting ability in the elderly was (170.52±28.39), the score differences in whether living alone, number of chronic diseases, whether had any medical personnel in family, whether the body had dysfunction had statistically significant( $p<0.05$ ). Conclusion: The self-supporting ability for elderly was at medium level, relevant people should take targeted measures to improve their ability. So as to promote physical and psychological health for the elderly.

## 1. Introduction

With the aging degree of Chinese population gradually intensified, people pay more and more attention to the elderly. The elderly had certain physical and mental problems, the health condition affected the elderly' quality of life<sup>[1]</sup>. The self-supporting ability of the elderly was related to their physical condition. In addition, the mode of self-supporting in elderly could reduce the burden of social and family, and was in line with our country positive aging concept. Understanding the problems existing in the aging process of the elderly, and improving their self-supporting ability were conducive to elderly people' physical and psychological health. So we investigate the current situation of self-supporting ability for the elderly in community, and to provide evidence for the promotion of physical and mental health of the elderly, and improve their quality of life.

## 2. Research Objects and Methods

### 2.1. Research Objects

316 elderly people were investigated in our research. We used convenient sampling method to survey research objects in community in Changchun. The inclusion criteria included: 1.  $\geq 60$  years old 2. Be able to fill in the questionnaire independently 3. No communication barriers 4. Informed consent. The exclusion criteria included: 1. Have a major illness, such as advanced stage of malignant tumor, severe heart failure, mentally disturbed 2. Elderly residents from other places

### 2.2. Research Tools

**2.2.1. General Demographic Characteristics Scale.** The general demographic characteristics scale was designed by ourselves. It included sex, years old, education level, whether living alone, number of chronic diseases, whether had any medical personnel in family, whether the body had dysfunction.

**2.2.2. Self-supporting Ability for the Elderly.** The self-supporting ability for the elderly was established by Shu-Qin PANG<sup>[2]</sup>. It had 45 items which divided into 3 dimensions, respectively were

economic independence ability(7 items),self-help ability(13 items),healthy self-maintenance ability(25 items).Each item scored by Likert 5 grade scoring method, totally not conform=1,not much conform=2,indetermination=3,relatively conform=4,totally conform=5.The total score was 45-225,the higher score the better self-supporting ability. Its Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was 0.95.

### 2.3. Investigation Method

We chose several communities that were easy to contact. Before investigating, we got the community managers' approval first. Secondly, we explained the purpose of the survey to the elderly in each community, and told them there were no privacy concerns. Finally, we began to give out our questionnaires. In the process of filling in the questionnaires for the elderly, we answered all the questions patiently to ensure the quality of questionnaires which were filled. The questionnaires were handed out and collected on the spot. In our research,340 questionnaires were given out and took back, the valid questionnaires were 316 among them. The recovery efficiency was 92.94%.

### 2.4. Statistical Method

We used the SPSS21.0 to collect and analyze data. The enumeration data were described by constituent ratio, the measurement data were described by  $\bar{x} \pm S$ , F/t test was used to compare the differences of elderly people's self-supporting ability with different demographic data.  $P < 0.05$  was identified as statistically significant.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. The Current Status of Self-supporting Ability in the Elderly

The total score of self-supporting ability in the elderly was  $(170.52 \pm 28.39)$ ,each dimension's average score was shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The score of self-supporting ability in the elderly ( $\bar{x} \pm S, n=316$ )

Dimension	Score	Rank
economic independence ability	$3.86 \pm 0.58$	1
self-help ability	$3.71 \pm 0.49$	3
healthy self-maintenance ability	$3.80 \pm 0.47$	2

### 3.2. Compare the Differences of Elderly People's Self-supporting Ability Based on Different Demographic Characteristics

The results revealed that the score differences in whether living alone, number of chronic diseases, whether had any medical personnel in family, whether the body had dysfunction had statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). Detailed results shown in Table 2.

**Table2.** Compare the differences of elderly people' self-supporting ability based on different demographic characteristics(  $\bar{x} \pm S, n=316$ )

Item	People number	Score	F/t	P
Sex				
Man	137	169.29 $\pm$ 29.15	0.65	0.51
Women	179	171.42 $\pm$ 28.27		
Years old(year)				
60-70	189	172.31 $\pm$ 28.42	0.28	0.75
71-80	112	170.25 $\pm$ 27.51		
>80	15	168.34 $\pm$ 28.17		
Education level				
College degree	199	168.37 $\pm$ 28.35	1.24	0.22
Bachelor degree	117	172.46 $\pm$ 28.17		
Whether living alone				
Yes	89	166.38 $\pm$ 29.15	2.94	0.00
No	227	174.44 $\pm$ 28.37		
Number of chronic diseases				
0-3	215	175.49 $\pm$ 28.71		
$\geq 4$	101	165.27 $\pm$ 29.16		
Whether had any medical personnel in family				
Yes	52	174.39 $\pm$ 29.32	2.13	0.03
No	264	165.18 $\pm$ 28.27		
Whether the body had dysfunction				
Yes	95	164.34 $\pm$ 28.41	3.37	0.00
No	221	176.33 $\pm$ 29.26		

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. The Current Situation of Self-supporting Ability in the Elderly was at Medium Level

Our research showed that the score of self-supporting ability in the elderly in community was (170.52  $\pm$  28.39), it was at medium level. The score was lower than the elderly' score in Fujian province (183.49  $\pm$  35.43)<sup>[3]</sup>, the difference between them had statistically significant (t=4.61, p<0.01). That result may be related to elderly people' different demographic characteristics, different living environment and different physical condition and so on. It prompted that community health workers or the elderly' family members should pay attention to the elderly' self-supporting ability, take some targeted measures to improve the ability. Especially in this situation with more families only had one children. Enhancing the self-supporting ability for the elderly could lighten the burden of children. The research of somebody put forward that family supporting was the the most popular model for older people. The elderly who spend old age at home got the highest life satisfaction<sup>[4]</sup>. A scholar' research showed that the elderly' physical condition who was cared at home was worse than those who was cared in social institutions<sup>[5]</sup>. So improving the self-supporting ability for the elderly was very important. As shown in Table1, the dimension of economic independence ability had the highest score. It explained that the investigated elderly' economic condition was well. The dimension of self-help ability had the lowest score. This may because of there were some elderly people had physical handicap problems. In addition, the dimension of healthy self-maintenance ability had lower score, elderly people should attach importance to their own health.

### 4.2. Compare the Differences of Elderly People' Self-supporting Ability Based on Different Demographic Characteristics

As shown in Table 2, the elderly who were living alone had weaker self-supporting ability than those who were not living alone. It may be related to lacking of caring and guidance for the elderly living alone. The family members should often care for the elderly, provide some healthy advice to them, so as to enhance their self-supporting ability. A research showed that social support could promote psychological health of solitary elderly<sup>[6]</sup>. So community service people should provide some support to the solitary elderly. The self-supporting ability of elderly who had more chronic

diseases was weaker than the other. Analysis of the reasons may be that the elderly who had more chronic diseases had worse physical condition, they took care of themselves relatively hardly. The elderly who had medical personnel in family had stronger self-supporting ability than the other. Maybe medical personnel in family could give guidance and help to the elderly timely. Whether the body had dysfunction was a influence factor. The elderly who had dysfunction got lower score, their self-supporting ability was weaker than the other. So the elderly with dysfunction should deserve more caring and help. Somebody put forward that regarding community as the new power of social endowment<sup>[7]</sup>. So community could offer help to the disabled elderly and try their best to play a certain role in improving elderly people' self-supporting ability.

## 5. Summary

The self-supporting ability for the elderly in community was at medium level, related personnel should take measures to improve the ability, particularly focus on the elderly who were living alone, had more chronic diseases, had no medical personnel in family and had body dysfunction. So as to promote physical and psychological health for the elderly.

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