# Elderly People in Urban China
## Perceived Discrimination, Satisfaction and Well-Being

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**ABSTRACT**

Sociologists have different kinds of views on dealing with ageing population problems. Therefore, this passage will mainly focus on urban-living Chinese elderly people research through various aspects. We are aiming at discovering the urban living elderly people's features, the experience they suffered, how they encountered the difficulties, how they feel about the perceived discrimination, how their lives are affected by this phenomenon, how their satisfaction fluctuates, and what is the social value of the elderly group. The social effects are expected as: Understanding people's perception of discrimination; Advocating youths to pay more attention and care to the elderly; Achieving a healthy ageing population in China. We believe that elderly people are entitled to their rights and not be deprived of their freedom and dignity by their age or other reasons.

*Keywords: Elderly people, China, Urban, Discrimination, Social, Well-Being.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1999, the rate of ageing in China has proliferated. The latest survey shows that ageism is everywhere. Age discrimination can become very systematic, depending on the facilities of the various services and programs. Ageism was mainly reflected in the standard of age, and society treated individuals in different and unequal ways. The elderly people in China are from a valuable generation, and they have experienced and helped the development of China. Everyone has a strong background of growth and a unique brand of China's development era. Their social value cannot be ignored. The elderly will be an important factor in future development. Currently, the related study is focusing on the discrimination towards elderly people in China. In this review, the central part is divided into four sections, respectively identifying the features, the stigma experience, well-being, and social value of the old.

The current role and meaning of the elderly population are changing from both local and global perspectives, also micro and macro perspectives. As Anthony Giddens had stated that elderly people should be regarded as a resource rather than a burden, he initiated

an idea on positive welfare in 1998 in his book *Third Way*. Giddens argued that instead of making people dependent on welfare, a modern welfare system should be created that encourages all citizens to work, providing welfare by themselves.

Moreover, the United Nations declaration of the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002 [1] had declared a tendency on redefining ageing as a time of activity, social engagements, and productivity rather than of decline and dependency had greatly influenced people's minds and thinking, no matter on nationally, regionally, and globally [2].

## 2. FEATURES OF THE URBAN ELDERLY

In May 2021, the seventh national population census is announced: the portion of sixty and above population increases by 5.44 percent [3]. Evidently, elderly people, especially those who live in urban areas, are undoubtedly an essential component of the entire population. This section is intended to explore the features of urban elderly people in China.

## 2.1 Busy on the Housework

Nowadays, the old in Chinese urban areas are usually responsible for the housework. The most common work includes looking after the baby, cooking for the family, and cleaning the house. A large amount of their daily time is utilized to serve the entire family. In other words, the old sacrifice their leisure or retired time so that the young in the family can entirely focus on their work. Three factors giving rise to a situation in which urban elderly people in China are busy with housework are illustrated below.

First of all, the implementation of the two-child policy potentially inflicts the burden on the old. Due to the ageing population, the Chinese government has had to conduct a two-child policy since 2015. As a result, the total population of China mainland reached 1.41 billion in 2020, an increase of 72.05 million over the sixth population census in 2010, with an average annual growth rate of 0.53 percent [4]. This situation inflicts a burden on parents and potentially takes up the old's time, for parents in China usually ask their parents--the old in the family--to take care of their children.

Furthermore, many families cannot afford to employ a nanny, so that the elderly people in a family undertake her work. In 2020, Chinese residents' per capita disposable income reached 32,189 yuan, and per capita expense reached 21210 yuan; the part--life essentials and services--accounts for 5.9% of the entire expense. Evidently, individuals nowadays are unwilling to spend overmuch income on this part, such services as the nanny, cleaning staff, etc. Eventually, the duty of looking after babies is undertaken by the old in the family.

## 2.2 Enjoy High Quality Life

From what we have mentioned above in terms of the three factors that lead to the busyness of the elderly people in urban areas of China, even though they have a heavy workload in the family, the life they currently have is much better and more comfortable than it used to be. Urbanization continues to improve, with 63.89% of the population living in urban areas [3]; The scale of the migrant population in 2020 was nearly 380 million, which is 150 million more than in 2010. Compared with the increase of 100 million in the previous decade, the growth rate of the Chinese migrant population has accelerated [5]. For instance, the medicine generated from the advance of science and technology guarantees the old's health. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, in 1949, the average life expectancy in China was less than 35 years. The spring epidemic prevention campaign and patriotic health campaign were launched in 1950. By 1957, life expectancy in China had reached 57 years. China's average life expectancy has reached 77 years, according to a report released by the NBS on Aug 22, 2019.

## 3. STIGMA EXPERIENCES OF URBAN ELDERLY GROUP

### 3.1 The Social System Discriminates Against the Elderly

The rapid development of society nowadays creates an awkward situation for the elderly. The ageing of the population has strengthened the influence of the elderly on the economic, social, and political fields and made the labour market, public resource allocation, social pension security, and intergenerational interest pattern show some new characteristics [6]. The ageing of the population has significantly increased the diversity of the social groups and posed challenges for society and government on how to take care of all groups simultaneously and make particular policies for all groups of people to give the benefits they deserve. That is what the government needs to think about. The elderly is generally considered to be uncompetitive and have no potential (compared to the young). As a result, governments generally devote more resources and care to the young, while the well-being of the elderly is gradually neglected or put on hold. Often this inequity is stigmatized in the distribution of employment, health care, education, and other public resources. The main reason for discrimination is prejudice against the elderly by other non-elderly people, who often regard the elderly as a burden on their families and society; It is also reflected in the misunderstanding and secondary harm caused by the imperfection of the system itself: non-elderly people, due to the cognition of the elderly in education (respect for the elderly), will think that the elderly have a lot of rights and benefits, resulting in psychological dissatisfaction and jealousy, and immediately generated the idea of burden. Furthermore, the elderly, because the legal system is not perfect, often do not enjoy the benefits and benefits, so there is a vicious circle of dissatisfaction on both sides.

### 3.2 Stereotypes Towards the Urban Elderly

Previous research proved that family, society, media and books are the primary sources of people's negative attitudes towards ageing, and the lack of intergenerational contact and knowledge about ageing are the main reasons for people's ageism [7].

Research has shown that prejudices and stereotypes about old age are internalising and permeating across age groups. For example, when asked about their views of older people, pre-schoolers tend to use negative words to describe them [8], which proves that they have learned in preschool that the initial view of the elderly is negative [9]. Admittedly, although they tend to have positive recognition results for one or two older people, they are familiar with due to contact and personality recognition, they still have negative stereotypes about the group impression of the old [8]. This process was described as

'A child who adopts prejudice takes over attitudes and stereotypes from his family or cultural environment' [10].

The research among Chinese college students shows a general tendency of ageism among college students, whether the subjective evaluation of the elderly or objective evaluation of their living status [9]. Moreover, a meta-analysis of ageism studies shows that older people are perceived as more damaging in terms of stereotypes, attractiveness, competence, and behaviour than younger people. Fortunately, stereotypes drop significantly when young people learn more about elder care in college.

The media also provide unenthusiastic impressions sometimes to the public. For example, the Chinese media usually defines the ageing group as pathetic and helpless, aiming to advocate for more people to pay attention to ageing care. Nevertheless, they did not realise the negative impact that the implicit negative impression of the elderly group was delivered to the public. Although it sometimes wanted to catch attention from the public for benefits, the media had intentions of emphasising some features of the elderly group, which may lead to misunderstanding. Various research had shown that how the public media define those ageing groups through several specific features, the mainstream of society would follow that pervasive and persistent stereotype [11]. For example, in 2006, the young adult Peng met an accident when helping the tumbled old lady on the street. He accidentally let himself and the old lady get hurt again. During the first instance, Peng was sentenced to 40,000 yuan in compensation, which caused an uproar in Chinese society. People began to accuse the old lady of extorting money and gave negative labels such as mean and bossy to the elderly [3].

Admittedly, social media has indeed created the convenience of two-way communication. However, in this society dominated by public opinion and thoughts, the elderly still has no chance to speak for themselves and can only be manipulated by the media on their image. By the exposure of their negative news, for example, the scramble for bus seats, the noise pollution, and the 'fraud' by misunderstanding, the impressions about them in others' minds declined. Moreover, the widespread stigma of older people online excludes them and makes them feel guilty and ashamed about their age group.

Self-stereotype was also a crucial discussion among the problems they encountered. For example, studies have found that older people not only often suffer from geriatric disorientation. Moreover, even older people themselves hold 'negative self-stereotypes' about ageing, such as feelings of decline, loss of function, diminished social status, and the perception that older people are a burden on society [12].

## 4. RESILIENCE AND SOCIAL SUPPORT (WELL-BEING)

We need to study how older groups "survive" and find ways to cope with so much stigma and discrimination. First, the root of age discrimination is a cognitive bias. When prejudice is further rationalized and accepted by the mainstream, it manifests as emotional alienation and behavioural rejection of the elderly. Secondly, institutional discrimination against the elderly enables non-elderly groups to maintain an advantage in the competition with the elderly for limited social resources, thus strengthening the concept of the stigmatization of the elderly. In short, cognitive and affective discrimination are transformed into visual behavioural discrimination under the protection of legality. When the mainstream of society accepts behavioural discrimination, it further lays the foundation for institutional discrimination. At the institutional level, age discrimination is usually manifested in housing, employment, compulsory retirement, education, health care, distribution of public resources, and social participation. The types and extent of discrimination vary greatly depending on social circumstances and policy objectives. In a more straightforward way to conclude the stigma: First, the protection exclusion system based on the protection of non-elderly groups leads to the exclusion of the elderly group, resulting in the unfair allocation of resources to the elderly group; The second is biased institutional discrimination, that is, based on cognitive prejudice and stereotype of the elderly. The impression that older persons are seen as a burden on social development; Third, there is institutional discrimination, often caused by policy arrangements that ignore or lag behind the needs of older persons. With a clear understanding of the causes and modalities of stigmatization, finding solutions becomes more straightforward.

The first and second stigmatization is most related to the psychological aspects. Direct stereotypes and cognitive biases must be changed through advocacy and education. In China, there is an old saying that "filial piety comes first", so the elderly has long held a high position in the family. Therefore, more attention and care for the elderly at the family level may improve the current situation.

According to Mark Mather [13]:" Families have traditionally been the primary source of financial and caregiving support for older adults in China, and most older adults have children living with them or nearby who can provide caregiving assistance. CHARLES data show that about 41% of older adults live with an adult child, and another 34% have an adult child living nearby." Given the condition of living with their own children, the elderly could have more chances to play a role in the family and improve their social values. As the developments of society become faster, and more and more young people in China need to face the stressors

from work and life, living with their parents would not be a wrong choice. Even after people get married and have children, most families choose to live with the elderly. Smith and colleagues argue that policies to help keep families together by allowing older adults to migrate to cities with their children could help reduce the caregiving gap in future years [14]. Although the original reason is not for the sake of the elderly, the result shows that the elderly have a better chance to integrate into and follow the development of society. Also, more important is self-resilience, "It is possible that with increasing age, older adults could develop strategies to cope with challenges and changes in their environments so that the sense of self-perceived satisfaction with life is maintained" [15]. Therefore, it is suggested to improve the adaptability of the elderly to achieve health and longevity by establishing and maintaining adequate emotional capacity, developing resistance to age-related negative stress, and developing a positive outlook on health and life for the elderly. As we go through the psychological aspects and cognitive solutions of the problem, it is easier to reach the goal of eliminating stigma. However, some typical solutions could not apply to discrimination and stigma since there is a lack of propagandizing and education resources in some areas. Thus, there is a more effective way to solve the last stigma.

The third stigmatization (lacking right policies) is usually reflected in two aspects: the policy system. First, policies for a particular area or a specific elderly group are not perfect, such as incomplete content, low level of operation, or lack of corresponding evaluation and monitoring system, resulting in ineffective or inefficient policies. The second point is reflected across the policy landscape: Due to the accelerated development of social transformation and population ageing, the pace of institutional renewal lags behind the change of the needs of the elderly, resulting in the absence of the overall policy [9]. Thus, the policies that solve the existing problem could be concluded in three main methods: The first is the direct support policy, which is to provide funds, materials, care resources, or other support to some special elderly groups, covering different groups such as rural poor elderly, retirees, and elderly people from rural family planning families, as a social welfare project that directly provides resources and services to the elderly. Secondly, indirect support policies, that is, by regulating and supporting the development of related management institutions, senior industry, and service industries for the elderly, indirectly promote the elderly to obtain better benefits and services. It included tax reduction and the exemption for elderly services, encouraging the socialization of community elderly services and accelerating the content of elderly care services and essential elderly care work.

Last but not least, the capacity developing, that is, to promote the realization of elderly care services. The social value of the elderly is mainly based on healthy young and elderly people. Therefore, volunteer groups are formed to give full play to the core value of the elderly group of human resources.

# 5. THE SOCIAL VALUE OF THE URBAN ELDERLY

Under the new situation of accelerating ageing of the population, increasing ageing problems and rapid social and economic development in China, the social value of the elderly has more and more apparent effects and profound implications for the development of China's ageing cause and even the development of the whole society. However, from the perspective of the current academic situation, there is still a lack of research on the social value of the elderly and many theoretical issues related to it. Therefore, the observation and analysis of the social value of the elderly require a comparative study and analysis of the social value of people of different ages.

Compared with other age groups, old age is functional and behavioural [16]. Specifically, old age is when a person's physical and social functions decline or are recreated. At the same time, due to the development of system, culture and social modernization, the social value and role of the elderly are also in a particular stage of change, or due to the reasons of system or culture, their social value has some unique content.

As the demographic dividend was gradually reaching the peak nowadays, the urban elderly group also became the strong-based consumers contributing to the economic growth on the internet perspective of China's GDP [17]. The modern development of Chinese society has brought a new idea, the infinite extension of the perception of old age. Compared with many years ago, people's age division of old age has been delayed. Therefore, the concept of 'old' should be redefined, as the border between the elderly and the prime of life become more blurred. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that the value of the elderly group did not diminish. We may summarize the value into several parts below:

## 5.1 Economic Value

Previous studies have shown that the level of consumption of the elderly is exceptionally high. This is because they embrace consumerism and have a lot of decision-making power. Many urban elderlies begin to pursue high-end and high-quality life. Based on their family's financial ability, they tend to choose higher quality, of course, more expensive goods and services to buy, enabling them to achieve higher benefits. In 2019, a study by TMALL International (a famous international cross-border shopping platform in China) showed that the consumption demand of the elderly had increased significantly in recent years. However, the cognition level and purchasing power of imported goods have also increased.

Older people who live in urban areas have an olive-shaped income structure while more than 70% have a middle or high income, which was a surprising number and indeed, they are the solid backbone of China's consumers. Moreover, emerging information technology and the development of science and technology make them have a higher sense of self-planning for the elderly, giving birth to many aspects of economic activities.

On the one hand, they retired from work and returned to life, actively participating in and helping with family operations and paying more attention to personal networking. On the other hand, older people living in cities may connect with their former classmates according to the remaining chain of friends, often dine together and travel together to enrich their retirement life. Alternatively, they create a new social circle based on their interests and expertise as a new pastime. In Shanghai, for example, many district or town governments have set up so-called 'cultural centres,' which are essentially perfect places for older people to socialize. For example, they formed makeshift bands in the square to play instruments or sing. More advanced cultural centres may also employ professional teachers to teach various subjects, including music, art appreciation, science, technology skills, etc. Over time, they have new requirements for their standard of living and start new economic activities like they may be keen on investing more in developing their interests. Thus, they gradually move to new living places and communities, find and adapt to new groups, and establish new character sets and self-identity. This will lead to a positive impact on the economy and increase the well-being of older people.

### 5.2 Family Value

As a diverse concept in society, the family needs different participation perspectives from different family members and support a family operation. The elderly, especially in China, were born at a particular time in the sea of New China's development; the ageing population in china stretches across multiple generations. The western world classified the older people in China into Silent Generation is mainly 1930s, Baby Boomers from the middle 1940s to late 1960s, and Generation X until the 1970s. During their growing process, they have experienced and conquered a challenging time compared to us. They have played a role of a cog in the machine, which means the witness of revolution [17]. They might also lose their opportunities to achieve higher education and abilities and go to other less developed villages to join voluntary works instead. Furthermore, they have also personally experienced the impact of China's reform and opening-up on their personal lives and the country's economy as a whole. Therefore, since different growing environment creates different personalities, they usually provide perspective and conflict with the youths. Here the term of intergenerational diversity should be emphasized;

we usually think about diversity by cultural means. The thing that we did not mention often was whether we might also consider that intergeneration could also provide similar rewards and results. Our parents, grandparents, and older relatives' knowledge can help us understand the evolution of an idea across time and bring us to a greater pondering depth [18].

The participation of old family members is worthwhile; it allows youthful members to communicate with people that do not belong to their age group and background. Having grown up in a different environment, older people are bound to form different values. The younger generation at home can have a collision of values when these elderly people get along and communicate with each other, making them better able to adapt to the impact of society in the future. After all, many people they meet in society cannot be guaranteed to have the same values. In the meantime, the different values of the elderly can also make the young generation reflect on themselves and combine the values of contemporary peers with the values of the elderly to form a set of good qualities of their own.

## 6. CONCLUSION

According to the United Nations report: Population ageing is widespread across the world. The aged population is currently at its highest level in human history. The significance and seriousness of the value of the ageing population had not been recognized and treated the way that they deserved in the past year around the world. Although it has long been a worldwide issue for every country, the various side-effects due to the fast developments of the economy and cities create an even larger gap between the youth and the elders. In today's society, there is not enough time and money being put forward to educate the ageing group about the value and knowledge. Thus, although the physical distance between the elderly group and others has rarely been far, cultural, social, and family responsibility gaps are enormous and unreachable. As the research shows, what the politicians and government should focus on now is finding the balance and connection between the young and the old group under a situation that does not harm either group. The main ways, as we concluded, to achieve the solution mainly focus on three aspects: laws and policies that protect the rights of the elders; focus on what the elder group's thoughts are (their thoughts on discrimination and their expectations); the advertisement and advocacy of youth education about the elders. Since the elderly group is almost closely related to every family and youth, these problems are urgent and need to be treated seriously by everyone.

In future studies, the research should continue studying the elderly group's treatment situation and their psychological and physical health. Social attention is also an important, valuable factor that needs to be focused on.

Since the fast developments of the cities, the elderly group will continue to be ignored or less focused due to their "low potential." So, how to correctly treat them and their social values are what the future society needs to solve.

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