

# Research on the Problem of Old-age Care for Female Elderly Living alone in Rural Areas

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, the issue of old-age care for the elderly has attracted widespread attention in the society. Due to gender disadvantage, older females may be more vulnerable among older adults. In most rural areas of our country, there are some rural elderly women who live alone and have a long distance from their children. This paper takes the female elderly living alone in rural areas as the research object, and learns that their economic resources are unstable, their lives are lack of care, and their medical and health conditions are poor. So this paper puts forward targeted measures such as establishing and improving the rural social pension mechanism, developing the local economy, encouraging returning home to start a business, and improving medical security. Through the exploration of the old-age care problem of female elderly living alone in rural areas, it is conducive to improving the problem of rural old-age care and realizing the beautiful vision of common prosperity.

**Keywords:** *Female elderly Living alone in Rural Areas; Old-age Care; Rural Area*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the statistics of the seventh census, as of November 1, 2020, China's elderly population aged 60 and above reached 264 millions, and accounting for 18.7% of the population. There are 2454410 more women than men aged 60 and over in rural areas of China. Some scholars have pointed out that the ageing process in China has taken on a gender-specific character, such as an imbalance in the gender ratio in old age and the difficult lives of older, more senior women and men. In later life, older women are both care recipients and supporters of their families' economic and emotional lives, and the social and family roles they play during the life cycle deeply influence their quality of life and their identity in later life. Xu Qin and Lily Wang argue that the increasing rate of widowhood among the female population as they enter old age has not only left them psychologically devastated and their living environment deteriorating, but they have also lost their economic resources and are highly dependent on their families for old age. But in recent years the traditional family model of ageing has gradually disintegrated. Older women living alone in rural areas deserve more attention, both in terms of numbers and in terms of the vulnerability they face.

This article refers to elderly rural women aged 60 years and over who live or live alone, and this definition

is mainly in terms of living space. Living alone means that they do not have close ties with their families, so they cannot rely entirely on them for their old age, but must also rely on the government and society. But the reality is that the absence of government and social forces in their daily lives makes life difficult for them in old age. Therefore, this paper will explore the issue of elderly women living alone in rural areas from three levels: government, society and family.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

### 2.1 Economic situation

Through the interviews, it was found that female elderly people living alone in rural areas were in a state of complete or semi-broken family structure due to widowhood, children living far away from home or children being ungrateful[7]. The three main sources of income for the elderly are their children's provisions, self-sufficiency and pension subsidies, and as the working capacity of rural elderly women living alone is gradually declining or even lost, they have a high level of economic dependency. The majority of elderly women living alone are still dependent on their children's provision, which varies according to family relationships, the degree of

filial piety of their children and their children's financial situation, so the economic resources of elderly women living alone in rural areas are very unstable.

## ***2.2 Living care situation***

Most of the elderly women living alone in rural areas are not able to take care of themselves, especially those who are ill as their health declines, and rely on their children or other relatives to take care of them. The top three caregivers for rural elderly women when they are unwell are their partners, their children and themselves, showing that the government and society are almost completely absent from the daily care they need[1]. As rural elderly women living alone age and become increasingly mobile, they are prone to accidents and injuries due to lack of care, including sudden illness, electrical safety and accidental falls.

## ***2.3 Medical and health conditions***

Most elderly women living alone in rural areas suffer from chronic diseases such as arthritis, hypertension, heart disease and so on. Treatment for these chronic diseases is a significant amount of their living expenses, and the medical expenses for these chronic diseases even exceed their living expenses. One reason is that they do not have enough money to pay for medical treatment, so they tend to delay minor illnesses and carry them on their shoulders, and they are also worried about causing problems for their children, so they always hide it or think that it will pass if they can't carry on. As a result, elderly women living alone in rural areas suffer from chronic diseases in their old age.

## ***2.4 Spiritual life***

Spiritual life is an important part of the life of the elderly, and the elderly living alone are prone to loneliness and isolation. The survey shows that the differences in the factors affecting the elderly suffering from chronic diseases in urban and rural communities are statistically significant in terms of distance from relatives, contact with relatives, contact with community friends, contact with neighbourhood and access to help, and that the urban elderly have a variety of activities while the rural ones are more homogeneous[2]. Rural elderly women are influenced by their environment, culture, and economic conditions, and they are not able to seek spiritual solace through reading books, newspapers, internet access, and travel, as elderly women in cities do. The spiritual life of elderly women living alone in rural areas is very monotonous, and with the death of their partners, they do not even have someone to talk to, so they feel lonely.

## **3. ANALYSIS OF CAUSE**

Based on interviews and analysis of the current situation of elderly women living alone, the following reasons for the plight of elderly women living alone in rural areas have been identified.

### ***3.1 Low level of rural economy and imperfect social security system***

As we all know, economic development provides the foundation and conditions for people's livelihood and welfare, and people's livelihood and welfare is an important goal of economic development[6]. Firstly, China has long practised a dual structure system of urban and rural areas, with the supply of various types of state resources preferred the cities, leading to inadequate development in rural areas; secondly, after the reform and opening up, in the process of urbanization and industrialization, a large number of young and middle-aged rural workforce have moved to the cities to work, and under the influence of lower income levels and higher living costs, children are not able to provide for their parents financially, and the traditional function of family old-age care has weakened, leading to the widespread emergence of "Finally, the current social security system in rural areas is not perfect and is one of the main reasons why rural elderly women living alone are living in poverty, as most of them are not covered by the rural social security system and are unable to change their current living conditions. Therefore, improving the rural collective economy and improving the rural social security system is a powerful means to protect the livelihood of rural elderly women living alone.

### ***3.2 Lack of family and social care in rural areas***

On the one hand, the current limited income of rural families and the rising cost of education and living for their children have led to great pressure on children to support the elderly, coupled with the phenomenon of weakening filial piety in recent years. On the other hand, with frequent population movements, many rural children find it difficult to stay with their parents in order to make ends meet, which can also lead to some families being forced to accept the situation of an empty nest or even living alone. In addition, the "happy home model" currently being piloted by the government is not well suited to the majority of elderly rural women, as older women of lower ages and in good health generally choose to stay at home and do what they can, such as helping their children who work outside the home to look after their children. As a result, the vacancy rate of "happy homes" is very high, not only does it not serve the purpose of providing old-age care for rural women, but also wastes the financial resources that are already scarce[1].

### ***3.3 Low level of medical services***

At present, with the in-depth implementation of rural health system construction projects and the gradual popularization of new rural cooperative medical care, the construction of rural medical infrastructure has improved significantly, but there are still some shortcomings: for one thing, the institutional mechanism is not sound. Under the current health care system, the equity and accessibility of health care is not enough. Secondly, the soft power of the medical services has not kept up in time. There is a lack of experienced doctors in primary health care institutions, and most of them are "barefoot doctors". Thirdly, the rural medical security system has not yet been perfected, and the majority of farmers have poor ability to resist the risk of disease, and the problem of poverty caused by illness and return to poverty is prominent, leading to poverty and illness among the needy.

### ***3.4 Lack of spiritual supply and demand***

According to the interviews, widowhood is an important reason for the elderly to live alone. For the elderly, widowhood is a major spiritual blow, and the lack of care and support from their spouses in life and spirit leads to depression and reduced quality of life. The lack of care and support from a spouse leads to depression and a lower quality of life for the elderly. This is compounded by the fact that rural elderly women have no recreational options compared to their urban counterparts, leaving them with nowhere to go. According to relevant surveys, the detection rate of psychological problems among elderly people living alone in urban areas is 24.1%, while in rural areas it is as high as 71.4%; more elderly people living alone in urban areas have a good relationship with their children than in rural areas; the psychological health of elderly people living alone in urban areas who participate in urban residents' medical insurance or employees' medical insurance is better than that of elderly people living alone in rural areas who participate in the new rural cooperative medical insurance, leading to the conclusion that the psychological health of elderly people living alone in rural areas is poor and needs draw the attention of the government, society and families, and require children and society to give more care to rural elderly women living alone[3], but they are a marginal disadvantaged group in society that is easily neglected, and therefore there is a serious lack of mental supply and demand content.

## **4. SUGGESTIONS FOR COUNTERMEASURES**

### ***4.1 Develop the local economy and encourage returning to the countryside to start their own businesses***

The root cause of improving the economic conditions of elderly women living alone in rural areas lies in improving the local economic conditions in rural areas. Under the background of rural revitalization, the local economy should be developed by using crops with regional characteristics or landscape resources, so as to increase the income of farmers, and when the income of children is raised, then the economic sources of the elderly also tend to be relatively stable. The development of the regional economy attracts local young adults to return to their hometowns for employment and reduces out-migration, which is more conducive to improving the collective economy and also gives them more time and energy to accompany and care for the elderly

### ***4.2 Establishing a sound mechanism for social retirement in rural areas***

The issue of rural old age needs the attention and support of society, especially the government. The government and society must fundamentally reverse the neglect of rural elderly women living alone, who lack financial resources more than men of the same age. Most rural elderly women living alone are neither benefit from the rural low income insurance nor are they able to change their current living situation, and are therefore in greater need of government subsidies. The government should incorporate gender awareness to gradually increase pension insurance premiums and achieve the goal of moving from nothing to something appropriate, so as to establish a survival guarantee for rural elderly women living alone.

### ***4.3 Improve medical care and improve medical standards***

The government and health departments should always put safety and health in the first place. The only way to better serve the villagers is to have a complete medical service network and supporting medical service facilities, not only in the upgrading of basic medical equipment, but more importantly, to have medical technology and services continue to go to the countryside in order to better use the equipment to serve the elderly living alone and to ensure that the bodies of women living alone can be treated in a timely and effective manner. Therefore, it is necessary to build a complete team of medical service providers, construct a rural service network, and increase investment in health care to improve medical standards.

#### **4.4 Develop community strength and encourage mutual help among neighbourhood**

Developing and mobilizing the strength of rural communities, organizing various social activities for elderly women living alone, and broadening their horizons and enrich their daily lives, such as square dances and rice singing at festivals, etc. Under the organization of the village community, the elderly can also be encouraged to participate in voluntary work and adopt corresponding incentives and subsidies, such as the rural rubbish sorting initiative. In the case of elderly women in rural areas, the Government can encourage neighbourhood to help each other by asking younger women in the neighbourhood to help take care of them, with the State and children sharing the costs. Community organized activities and neighbourhood mutual help initiatives can motivate elderly women living alone in rural areas to find value and joy in their lives.

### **5. CONCLUSION**

Based on the characteristics and current situation of female elderly living alone in rural areas, this article proposes the idea that the government, society and family should work together in a tripartite manner to participate and solve the elderly care problem, which is conducive to the formation of an effective governance network and solid backing. The problem of elderly women living alone in rural areas needs to be improved in practice and requires the attention and consideration of the whole society. As the rural revitalization strategy continues to advance, there is a long way to go for the elderly in rural areas, and we need to devote more energy to the protection of vulnerable groups, so that we can better solve the "three rural issues" in China and promote the rural revitalization strategy.

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