

Impact of Functional Disability on Depressive Symptoms among Middle-aged and Elderly People in China: Evidence from China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study

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ABSTRACT

Existing research has demonstrated a strong relationship between elderly functional disability and depressive symptoms. Few studies, however, have explored the causality, long-term effects, and mechanisms of middle-aged and elderly functional disability's impact on depressive symptoms. Data were drawn from the 2013, 2015, 2018 and 2020 China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS). This study consists of 6173 middle-aged and elderly respondents. And all participant's depressive symptoms and activities of daily living (ADLs) and instrumental ADLs (IADLs) was assessed four times. A quasi-natural experiment method of difference-in-differences (DID) was used to eliminate endogenous problems caused by missing variables. Functional disability can significantly increase depression level of middle-aged and elderly people ($\beta=1.970$, confidence interval [CI] 1.295-2.646). Compared with rural residents, functional disability has a higher impact on the depression level of urban people ($\beta=1.730$ vs $\beta=2.361$). Compared with elderly people, functional disability has a higher impact on the depression level of middle-aged people ($\beta=1.674$ vs $\beta=3.039$). Functional disability can indirectly improve the depression level of middle-aged and elderly people by cutting down their social activities. Functional disability has long-term impact on depression level of middle-aged and elderly people, middle-aged and elderly people who were in the treat group had significantly higher levels of depression than the control group for at least 6 years once they start to suffer functional disability. This study also has some limitations, including the lack of distinction between levels of functional disability and the reliance on self-reported scales to evaluate depressive levels and functional disability. In conclusion, functional disability can lead to sustained higher levels of depression in middle-aged and older individuals, primarily due to the loss of social activities.

Keywords: Depressive Symptoms; Functional Disability; Causality

How to Cite

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