

Relationship Between Attitudes Toward Aging and Functional Ability: Mediating Role of Mental Health and Difference by Urban-rural Residence

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ABSTRACT

Ageism has serious and wide-ranging consequences for the health and well-being of older adults worldwide. It involves stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against people based on their age. In a competitive modern society, these effects can be even more pronounced among urban older adults, where the fast-paced environment may exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and isolation. This study examines the association between attitudes toward aging, depressive symptoms, and physical ability among older adults, focusing on the differences between rural and urban populations. Specifically, it seeks to understand how these attitudes and associated factors impact functional health differently in diverse settings. The research used cross-sectional data from 10,382 participants across various regions in China, with 64.6% being urban residents and 35.4% being rural residents. Participants were surveyed to assess their attitudes toward aging, levels of depressive symptoms, and physical abilities. The association between attitudes toward aging and functional ability was analyzed using linear regression models, allowing for adjustments in demographic variables such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status. Grouped regression analyses were applied to explore the moderating effects of the urban-rural division, revealing how geographic and social contexts may shape these relationships. Mediation analysis was conducted using the KHB method to quantify the indirect effects of depressive symptoms on the primary relationship. The results indicated that attitudes toward aging statistically influence functional health among Chinese older adults ($\beta = 0.03$, 95% CI = 0.02, 0.04). Notably, there was a significant urban-rural difference in how these attitudes affected physical ability ($\beta = 0.05$, 95% CI = 0.03, 0.07 for urban adults; $\beta = 0.02$, 95% CI = 0.01, 0.03 for rural adults). Depressive symptoms were found to mediate the relationship between attitudes toward aging and functional health status ($\beta = 0.03$, 95% CI = 0.02, 0.04), suggesting that negative attitudes toward aging can exacerbate mental health issues, which in turn affect physical health. The study concludes that older adults often view the decline in bodily function as an inevitable aspect of aging, with these attitudes being significant psychological factors influencing their functional health. The findings suggest that community



interventions aimed at reducing ageism could be effective in enhancing both the mental and functional health of older adults. Promoting positive attitudes toward aging and increasing awareness about the impacts of ageism are crucial steps in addressing these issues, particularly in urban environments where ageism may be more prevalent.

Keywords: Ageism, Depressive symptoms, Activities of Daily Living

How to Cite

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