

A Review of Research on Life Satisfaction among the "Floating Elderly" from the Perspective of Population Mobility

Zhang Xiaohan*

School of Politics and Law, University of Jinan, Jinan, China

**Corresponding Author*

Abstract: With the convergence of urbanization and population aging, the size of the "floating elderly" population—those who relocate to live with their children to care for their grandchildren—continues to expand. Their life satisfaction is closely related to individual well-being and social stability. In this paper, from the perspective of population migration, the research on the life satisfaction of "floating elderly" is systematically sorted out, and its theoretical basis and core research framework of "external environment internal individual" are analyzed. It focuses on the mechanism of the three key influence dimensions of institutional environment, social integration and family support. Based on this, this paper proposes to deepen the reform of the household registration system, strengthen the supply of social security and pension services for the "floating elderly", build a community integration platform, enhance inter-generational support, and improve the "floating elderly" rights and interests protection system.

Keywords: Elderly Migrants; Life Satisfaction; Population Mobility

1. Introduction

China's modernization drive has entered a new stage of development. The synchronous advancement of urbanization and population aging has profoundly changed the country's population spatial distribution and social structure. According to the data of the National Bureau of statistics, the urbanization rate of China's permanent population will reach 67.0% in 2024, 0.84% higher than that at the end of 2023. Large scale population flow has become a prominent population phenomenon in the process of urbanization in China. At the same time, the process of population aging in China is accelerating. By the end of 2023, the population

aged 60 and above has exceeded 290million, accounting for 21.1% of the total population. It is estimated that this proportion will exceed 30% by 2050. The "14th five year plan" for the development of the national cause of aging and the elderly care service system emphasizes that efforts should be made to solve the urgent, difficult and urgent problems of the elderly in social security, elderly care and medical care, so as to ensure that the elderly share the fruits of reform, and have a sense of security, security and happiness for the elderly. Under this macro background, China's population flow pattern is undergoing significant changes. Population mobility now includes not only the traditional youth labor mobility, but also the normalization and diversification of the elderly population mobility. The scale of the "floating elderly" - the elderly who move to different cities to care for their grandchildren or rely on their children for support - continues to expand. Because of their unique living conditions and diverse social needs, they have become the focus of the study of floating population, and become a unique group that can not be ignored in the tide of population migration .

The concept of "mobile elderly" was first proposed in the early 21st century. It refers to the elderly individuals who migrate from their original place of residence to the city where their children work and live in order to support their children's development and fulfill their family care responsibilities without the transfer of household registration. In 2010, the concept of "floating elderly" was first proposed by the domestic academic community. Relevant scholars pointed out that the "floating elderly" is a group that "for the continuation of the family, uses the wax left by the unburned candle to seek the final brightness and warmth, and needs the care and care of the society". . Currently, academic research on this group focuses on their social integration , migration mechanisms , and housing preferences .There are significant

differences between the "floating elderly" and the traditional elderly group in the life concepts of "attachment to the hometown" and "return to the origin". Their migration behavior is highly passive and dependent; Members' migration decisions are not based on personal development needs, but on the overall interests of the family, representing the extension and reconstruction of intergenerational family support in the spatial dimension. From the perspective of sociology, the emergence of "floating elderly" is closely related to the transformation of China's social structure. On the one hand, the process of urbanization has led to the imbalance between urban and rural development and regional development. A large number of young and middle-aged labor force are concentrated in the first and second tier cities and economically developed areas, which has established a stable employment and housing mode for the young generation. The resulting responsibility gap of childcare and family care objectively needs the participation of older relatives. On the other hand, in the context of the declining birth rate, the nuclear family has become the dominant family structure. As both husband and wife are trying to balance work and family care, the support provided by elderly parents has become an important pillar to maintain the normal operation of the family.

The migration of "floating elderly" not only disrupts the established pace of life and social network of the elderly, but also makes them face a series of adaptation challenges in the new community. Their quality of life and subjective satisfaction in these new communities have become key indicators to measure family harmony and evaluate the effectiveness of social governance. At the individual level, because these elderly migrants have left their long-term familiar living environment and cut off the connection with the social support network they have established, they often face multiple challenges in the new community, such as language barriers, cultural differences, lifestyle conflicts and so on. This makes them prone to loneliness, anxiety, helplessness and other negative emotions, which affect their psychological state and life experiences to varying degrees. From the perspective of family, as the core force in family care, the living conditions of "floating elderly" are closely related to the quality of care they provide. If their life satisfaction in the new community is

low, it will not only affect their own health, but also cause intergenerational conflict and destroy family harmony. From a social perspective, the expansion of the "floating elderly" group has become a common social phenomenon. This group faces common challenges in terms of public services, transitional social security treatment and social integration. At the same time, it also reflects that there is still room for optimization and improvement in the governance of population mobility and the social service system for the elderly in China. If we further strengthen and accurately optimize the relevant mechanisms of livelihood security and integration support, it will better serve the well-being of the elderly and promote social inclusion and harmonious development. Therefore, paying attention to the life satisfaction of the "floating elderly" and analyzing its influencing factors and improvement path are not only the internal requirements of ensuring the well-being of the elderly, but also the important tasks of promoting family harmony, improving social governance and responding to the challenges of population transformation.

Based on the research status and practical needs, this paper systematically reviews the relevant research results at home and abroad from the perspective of population mobility, and puts the migration behavior of the "floating elderly" under the macro background of the superposition trend of urbanization and population aging. This study clarifies the theoretical basis of the study on the life satisfaction of the "floating elderly", combined with the core characteristics of population mobility, and deeply analyzes the mechanism of various factors affecting their life satisfaction. The purpose of this paper is to put forward targeted and operable policy recommendations to solve the deficiencies in the integration of existing research perspectives, deepen the understanding of the impact mechanism of life satisfaction of "floating elderly", and provide valuable insights for the further development of follow-up research.

2. The Theoretical Foundation of Research on the Life Satisfaction of the "Floating Elderly"

The extended push-pull theory provides a key perspective for analyzing the migration causes of the "floating elderly". Specifically, while the traditional push-pull theory focuses on economic migration, the non-economic migration

characteristics of the "floating elderly" have prompted scholars to expand the theoretical framework, including family care needs, inter-generational support responsibilities and other factors into the push-pull system .

According to the traditional push-pull theory, population migration is the result of the combined action of the "push" of emigration and the "pull" of immigration. However, the migration behavior of the "floating elderly" presents distinct non economic characteristics; Their migration is not driven by the pursuit of personal economic interests. This has prompted the traditional push-pull theory to expand and incorporate non economic factors such as family care needs, intergenerational support responsibilities, and the need to maintain family relations into the push-pull framework. In the Migration Decision-making of the "floating elderly", the "push factor" is mainly manifested in the transmission of the pressure of family care for their children, while the "pull factor" is manifested in the emotional attachment and intergenerational responsibility for their children. This unique dynamic structure directly shapes the migration expectation of the "floating elderly" - their core appeal lies not in personal development, but in the enhancement of family functions and the harmony of intergenerational relations. Therefore, the evaluation of the "floating elderly" on life satisfaction is closely related to the feedback at the family level.

The theory of social integration originated from immigration research, which believed that the individual's quality of life and subjective satisfaction depended on the degree of fit between the individual and the destination's social environment. The higher the compatibility, the deeper the social integration, and the stronger the subjective well-being. For the "floating elderly", a unique floating population social integration, it is a multidimensional reconstruction process involving the formation of social relations, cultural cognition and identity. The specific performance is the rupture of their original social network and the reconstruction of the new network, the adaptation and acceptance of the cultural customs of the destination, and the transformation from the identity of "outsiders" to the identity of "community members". -This is not just a simple geographical relocation. The study confirmed that there was a significant positive correlation between the social integration of the "migrant

elderly" group and their life satisfaction: for those who can quickly rebuild the social support network and actively adapt to the cultural life of their new homes, their sense of loneliness and alienation were significantly reduced, and their subjective well-being and life satisfaction were higher ;On the contrary, if they are in a state of "social isolation" for a long time and cannot integrate into the local community, such elderly floating population is prone to negative emotions, which will reduce their life satisfaction.

In addition, social support theory and activity theory are widely used in the study of life satisfaction of elderly floating population. Social support theory holds that social support refers to the resources that individuals obtain from social activities, including material or emotional help from family, friends and others. Individual social support network is an important buffer mechanism for individuals to cope with life pressure and adapt to environmental changes; The size, density and effectiveness of this network can directly and significantly affect the subjective well-being of individuals. For the "floating elderly", the migration process disrupted the long established support network of relatives, neighbors and friends in their place of origin. The speed and level of development of the new support network directly affect their ability to cope with the challenges of life in their new location. The well-developed new social support network can effectively relieve the adaptation pressure faced by the "floating elderly" and enhance their sense of security and life satisfaction; On the contrary, the lack of support network will aggravate their sense of loneliness and helplessness.

Activity theory is based on the perspective of individual active participation. According to this theory, the subjective well-being of the elderly stems from the process of actively participating in social activities and realizing self-worth. If the "floating elderly" can actively participate in community activities in the new community, such as elderly education and volunteer service, it can not only expand their social circle and accelerate social integration, but also obtain a sense of achievement and belonging through these social activities, so as to effectively improve their subjective well-being and life satisfaction. Relevant studies further confirmed that the scale and quality of the social support network of the "floating elderly" group can positively predict their life satisfaction.

3. Analysis of Factors Influencing Life Satisfaction Among the "Floating Elderly" from the Perspective of Population Mobility

3.1 Institutional Environment Dimension

The institutional environment, as the external macro background of the migration life of the "floating elderly", directly affects their livelihood security level in the inflow area. The long-standing household registration system in China closely links the provision of public services with the household registration identity of individuals, making it difficult for the "floating elderly" who have not transferred their household registration to enjoy core public service resources such as medical care, elderly care and public cultural services like the local elderly.

In addition to the challenges brought by the household registration system in coordinating public services, the regional coordination and cross regional cooperation mechanisms within the social security system are also constantly improving. To a certain extent, the "floating elderly" group is facing practical challenges in ensuring the continuity of social security coverage in the inflow and outflow areas, and this factor has become an important practical reason for affecting their life satisfaction. At present, China's social security system is moving in the direction of national planning, the level of planning for core projects such as pension and medical insurance is constantly improving, and the trans regional transfer and coordination mechanism is constantly improving. However, due to the objective factors such as the regional development gap and the pace of administrative coordination, there is still room for improvement in some areas of the trans regional transfer of social security relations. For the "migrant elderly" group, their pension insurance relationship is often retained in the domicile, and the specific procedures need to be followed to obtain relevant services in their destination. Some regions face difficulties in the continuity of social security coverage due to insufficient understanding of social security policies in other regions and relatively complex application processes. The survey showed that 35.2% of the "elderly floating population" believed that "after leaving the original residence, some benefits linked to the household registration have failed one after another". In addition, 46.1% of the

"elderly floating population" believed that "medical insurance reimbursement, endowment insurance, medical insurance, elderly assistance and other systems lack cross regional interoperability, and the differences are large, which brings great inconvenience to daily life".

3.2 Social Integration Dimension

Social integration refers to the process that the "floating elderly" integrate into the social and cultural environment of their new residence, adjust and adapt between the new culture and the original culture, organically internalize the new culture, and finally adapt to the new social environment. The fracture and reconstruction of social network is the core obstacle in the process of social integration of "mobile elderly", and it is also the key factor limiting the improvement of their life satisfaction. For the elderly, the network of relatives, neighbors and friends built in their hometown over the years is an important basis for daily mutual assistance, and also the main source of emotional comfort. After years of accumulation, these networks have formed a stable trust relationship and effective support, which has become an important guarantee for the elderly's sense of security and belonging. The migration of "floating elderly" effectively constitutes a sudden separation and fragmentation of their original social network. With more and more immigrants moving, their living habits, behavior, thinking mode, values and so on are solidified due to the changes of geographical space and living environment. They must overcome many obstacles to adapt to life in the new place. In addition, as the elderly enter the physiological aging stage, they are physically and psychologically disadvantaged. Rebuilding their new social network faces many obstacles and difficulties: on the one hand, the daily activities of the "floating elderly" are concentrated in their families; They spend most of their time caring for their grandchildren and managing housework, and lack the time and opportunity to actively communicate and interact with local community residents; On the other hand, the willingness and ability of social interaction of the elderly declined with age. Coupled with language barriers and cultural differences, this makes it difficult for them to quickly integrate into local social circles. Empirical research shows that "floating seniors" lack appropriate social partners and sufficient frequency of interaction in their new

communities, a situation that easily leads to feelings of loneliness. For them, daily social interaction is limited to their children and grandchildren, and there is hardly any meaningful interaction with other community residents. This "social isolation" state makes it difficult for them to obtain timely and effective social support in the face of life challenges, resulting in a strong sense of loneliness and helplessness, which directly reduces their life satisfaction.

3.3 Family Support Dimension

The family is not only the primary driving force for the migration and mobility of the "floating elderly", but also the main place of their lives. Within this space, the quality of support provided by children directly affects the life satisfaction level of the elderly. In this context, the quality of intergenerational interaction and the suitability of the support model are important factors affecting the life satisfaction of the elderly floating population. The level of financial support and the level of daily care provided by children have a significant impact on the mental health of the elderly population. The migration behavior of "mobile elderly" is essentially a spatial reconstruction of intergenerational support. At the cost of their own time and energy, they provide daily support for their children's families, such as taking care of their grandchildren and managing housework. Behind this sacrifice, there is a deep expectation that their children will repay each other with emotion and emotional recognition. When intergenerational interaction operates harmoniously, the children of these "floating elderly" fully realize the value and significance of parents' care for the family. They actively provide emotional support and practical help. In turn, members of this group turned their hard work into a strong sense of self-worth and emotional satisfaction, which significantly improved their life satisfaction. On the contrary, if children take care of the "floating elderly" as a matter of course, simply regard their parents' efforts as their own responsibility, and do not give the necessary emotional response and value recognition - or even disapprove of and oppose the living habits and educational philosophy of the "floating elderly", resulting in resistance - this will cause a strong and negative psychological gap for the "floating elderly". Family living arrangement is a physical space

for intergenerational interaction and communication between the "floating elderly" and their children. Whether their choice of living arrangements meets the needs of the "floating elderly" also has a significant impact on their own life satisfaction. Living with children is the housing choice of most "floating elderly". The advantage of this model is that it can provide immediate care and support, and promote mutual care between the "floating elderly" and their children. When the "floating elderly" encounter difficulties in daily life, they can get help from their children at any time, and their children can timely monitor their parents' health and mental status. But this mode of cohabitation will also produce new contradictions: on the one hand, there are certain intergenerational differences in living habits and values between the elderly and their children; Long time close contact will magnify these differences, leading to friction and conflict. On the other hand, living together often means the lack of personal space for the elderly floating population, and this sense of space restriction will aggravate their psychological distress ". The elderly floating people living separately from their children and other family members (such as grandchildren) enjoy independent and relatively spacious living and private areas, which helps to reduce intergenerational friction, differences and conflicts. However, the members of this group also face new challenges and difficulties: for example, for the elderly" old floating people "with poor health, separation may mean insufficient care resources, making it difficult for them to manage their daily life alone; even for the young" floating elderly ", separation may lead to lack of emotional companionship, exacerbate their daily loneliness, and may lead to depression symptoms.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing the life satisfaction of the "floating elderly", combined with the current situation of population mobility governance and the social service system for the elderly, this paper puts forward the following suggestions: First, deepen the reform of the household registration system and break down the household registration barriers in the supply of public services. In view of the cross regional medical problems frequently concerned by the "floating elderly", we should optimize the cross

regional medical insurance settlement system and relevant regulations, simplify the registration procedures, implement real-time medical insurance settlement, establish a unified settlement network, and strive to achieve national overall planning at an early date. In addition, the public cultural resources in the destination area should be fully and equally provided to the members of the "floating elderly" community. We should enrich cultural resources including university courses for the elderly, community cultural activities and public sports facilities, expand the scope of cultural services, and cover all the permanent elderly population, so as to protect the cultural rights and interests of the "floating elderly".

Second, we should improve the cross regional coordination mechanism of the social security system and strengthen the safety net for the "floating elderly". Accelerate the national planning of core social security projects such as pension and medical insurance; Simplify daily affairs management procedures; The implementation of "one-stop online service" and "inter provincial handling" will reduce the time and energy required for "mobile elderly" to handle various procedures; And through the local community and social security institutions to carry out special policy briefings, to solve the problem that some members of this group lack social security knowledge. Moreover, we should reduce fees through financial subsidies, tax cuts and fees, and increase support for private pension institutions in destination areas. At the same time, public pension institutions are encouraged to reserve a certain proportion of beds for this group and provide them with various policy benefits to alleviate the difficulties they face in old-age security.

Third, promote the construction of the support system, promote the social integration of the "floating elderly", and establish a diversified platform for social interaction and adaptation. At the community level, the community should organize activities with the theme of society, culture and volunteers to provide "mobile elderly" with space and opportunities for daily life, leisure, entertainment and social interaction. This can help the "floating elderly" community form an organized group, so as to obtain more diversified social support ;Social workers, volunteers and local elderly in the communities where these elderly people live should form an "integration support group" to help them

familiarize themselves with the guide to urban life, master the use of smart devices, and alleviate barriers to cultural adaptation. At the same time, the community is encouraged to cultivate interest groups with various themes as the core for these elderly floating population, stimulate their enthusiasm to participate in community governance, and strengthen their sense of identity and belonging.

Fourth, the family is the micro environment that affects the integration of the "floating elderly" into the city; Family relations, family rules and family communication are all important factors affecting their well-being. Optimize the family pension model, strengthen the intergenerational support responsibility of children, and develop a diversified family care system. Through various and rich outreach methods such as daily guidance and educational activities of community staff, children's emotional care, concern and sense of responsibility for the daily well-being of elderly parents should be strengthened. We should advocate that children should actively pay attention to and care for their parents' psychological well-being, ensure regular and effective communication and emotional exchanges between children and elderly parents, and respect their parents' living habits and values; When the pressure of family care is particularly heavy, the community can regularly provide universal or free childcare services to help "migrant elderly" families reduce the burden of caring for their children. Through public service facilities such as community elderly care centers and elderly canteens, families can be provided with professional care support, so as to alleviate the care burden of "floating elderly".

Fifth, we should improve the comprehensive rights and interests protection mechanism of the "floating elderly" and establish a comprehensive rights and interests protection system for this group. We should build a multi-level and comprehensive rights protection system for this group. By refining the existing laws, regulations and policies, the legal rights and interests of the "floating elderly" in housing, medical care, pension and other aspects of life are clearly defined, and this group is fully integrated into the overall framework of the protection of the rights and interests of the floating population. On this basis, we will further expand the channels for this group to express their concerns and opinions. By using diversified

communication methods such as community opinion collection and network feedback platform, we can timely understand the actual needs of the elderly population, so as to provide reliable and effective reference for the optimization and refinement of relevant public services and governance policies.

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