



The Mediating Role of Social Support in the Relationship Between Intergenerational Proximity and Older Adult's Well-being: Evidence from China

Xiaoyi Yu¹, Yangmu Huang¹, Zhongfei Pei¹, Yifan Yao¹, Ming Xu¹

1. Department of Global Health, School of Public Health, Peking University, Beijing, China

Objective

This study investigates how residential distance between older adults and their children impacts various dimensions of well-being through different types of social support mechanisms, addressing gaps in understanding the complex interplay between geographical proximity, social support, and aging outcomes in the Chinese cultural context.

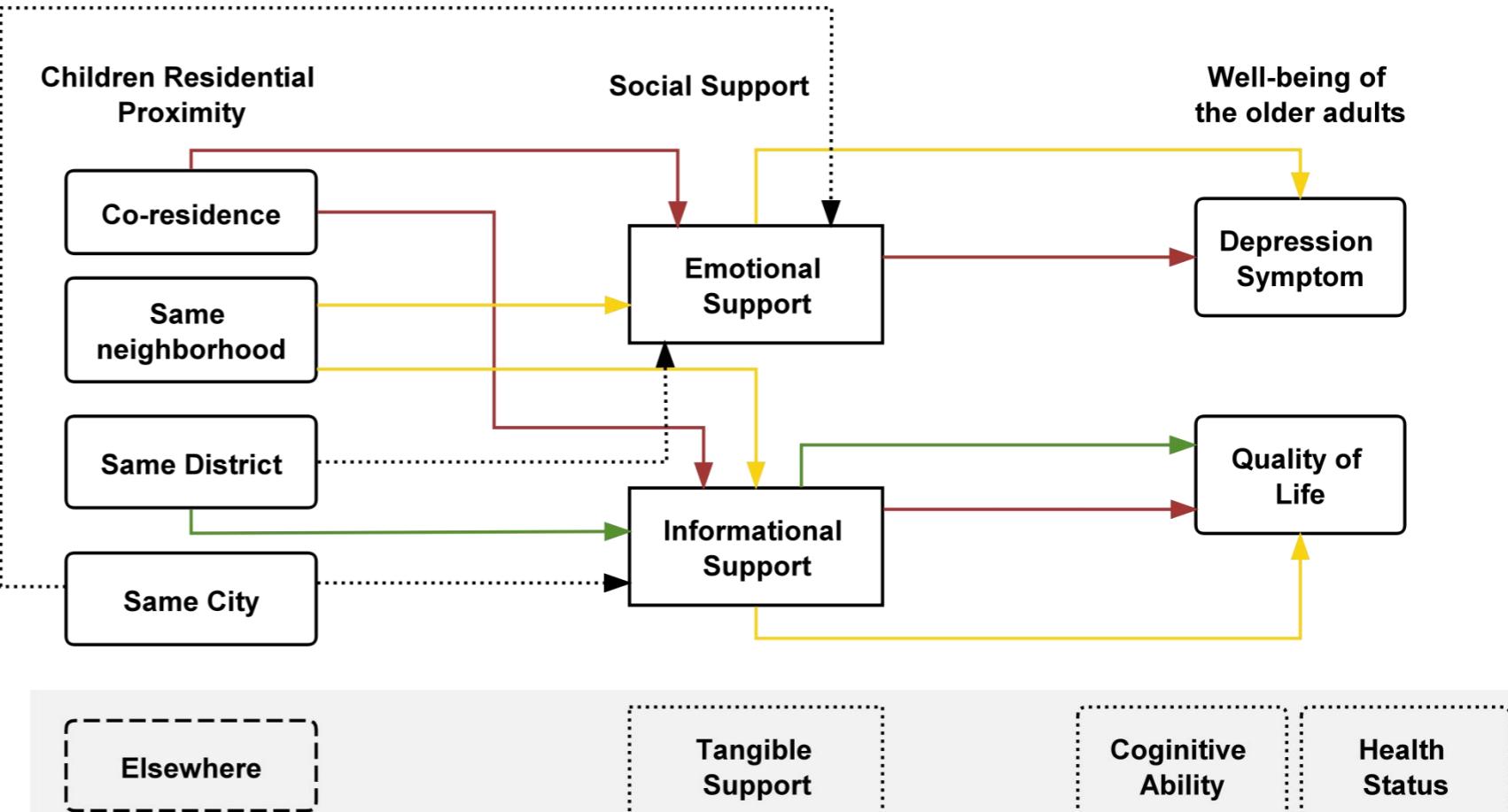
Methods

Using four waves of **CLHLS** data (2008–2018), this study analyzed 2054 older adults aged 65+ across 22 Chinese provinces (8216 person-wave observations). Children's proximity was classified into six levels from coresiding to living elsewhere. Four well-being outcomes were assessed: self-rated quality of life, self-rated health, cognitive function, and depressive symptoms. Two-way fixed effects models controlled for individual heterogeneity and temporal trends. Baron and Kenny mediation analysis examined three potential pathways: emotional, informational, and tangible support.

Results

Compared to older adults whose children live elsewhere, those with children in the same district or closer reported significantly higher quality of life ($\beta=0.233$ to 0.280 , $p<0.05$). For depressive symptoms, same-neighborhood or coresiding arrangements showed significant reductions ($\beta=-0.846$ to -1.834 , $p<0.05$). Closer proximity was significantly associated with increased emotional and information support ($\beta=0.235$ to 0.509 and $\beta=0.294$ to 0.421 , respectively), but not tangible support.

Mediation analysis revealed that informational support fully mediated effects on quality of life, while emotional support partially mediated effects on depressive symptoms. **Subgroup analyses** demonstrated significant heterogeneity: effects were more pronounced among women, individuals without primary education, and older cohorts (>75 years), while males and younger elderly showed no significant associations.



Conclusion

Informational and emotional support from children serve as key mediating mechanisms linking proximity to elderly well-being, with informational support affecting quality of life and emotional support alleviating depression. Stronger effects among **women, less-educated, and older adults** reflect cumulative disadvantage patterns. These findings inform intergenerational support policies amid urbanization challenges to traditional family structures.