Absent Role of the State –
Analysis of social support for older people with disabilities in rural China

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Outline

Background

Research question

Methods

Findings

Implications for Chinese social policy for older people and people with disabilities
Background

Rapid population ageing – 153 million

Older people with disabilities – 44 million

Social support for older people with disabilities undeveloped, particularly in rural areas

Family based support
Disability rights framework

Rights in four domains

- Protection
- Economic security
- Social support
- Social participation
Research question

What is the experience of older people with disabilities receiving social support in a rural community?

- Who provides the support?
- What are the barriers to realising their rights?

Analyse with local cases from South China
Methods

Fieldwork with older people aged over 80 years

County in Shanxi Province

Research methods

- small scale questionnaire
- 10 households in each village
- 70 in-depth interviews older people, most with support needs
- 60% women; 94% rural
Characteristics

Low education, especially women – 77% illiterate

Marital status

- Widowed - women 83%, men 64%
- Spouse – women 17%, men 36%

Household size

- 4 people (range 1-14)
- 3 generations (range 1-5)
- 4 children of older person (range 1-9)
Economic and health status

Economic condition

- Self evaluated: 50% good; 20% very good; 20% poor; 10% very poor
- Living expenses per month: 43% <100RMB; 36% 100-200; 12% > 200
  (10% missing, RMB5:Aus$1)

Health status

- Health: 40% good; 24% excellent; 36% poor or very poor
- Disability 23% - physical, vision, multiple
- Chronic illness 64%
- Care support: 46% fully independent; 40% partially independent; 14% fully dependent
Social support

Family support

- Personal care and mobility (14 - 40%); financial management (31%)
- Most low level support 67%
- Live with spouse or family 86%

Support of older people with disabilities

- Pressure on family members – emotional, physical, financial

Most difficult for

- Older people caring for oldest people
Pressure of family social support

Most difficult for

- Older people caring for oldest people
- Caring for older people and other people with disabilities
- Conflict between paid work and care responsibilities

Government support rare and costly

Private paid support unaffordable - 1 person used it

Personal cost of ageing, disability and health unmanageable
Findings about impact of absent state

Negative impact on the wellbeing of rural families

Negative for older people and family members

- Older people heavily rely on financial and care support from their children
- Family is over burdened financially and affects physical and mental health and family relationships
Findings about rights of older people

In the absence of state support, social rights of older people with disabilities in rural China are jeopardised

Rights dependent on family capacity

- Protection – vulnerable to family situation, depression, waiting for death
- Economic security – no independence, household economic cost increases with disability
- Social support – depend on shared household with children, no choice in household living arrangement
- Social participation – isolated in family home
Implications for social policy

Ageing population in China

New approach to the Chinese welfare state

- Strengthen role of the state in social support – income and care
- Older people and people with disabilities
- Rural areas
Implications for social policy research

Absence of the role of the state raises questions for Chinese social policy and theory

- How do the experiences of ageing with disabilities vary across China – rural, city, poverty?
- How do the experiences vary for
  - People with disabilities who are ageing?
  - Older people acquiring disability through ageing?
- How does gender affect experiences of ageing with disability for
  - People with disabilities?
  - Family members?
Resources

- China social policy – SPRC research projects
  Social support for older people with disability in China
  www.sprc1.sprc.unsw.edu.au/researchtitles.asp?MCatID=17

- Fisher & Shang 2008, Supporting older people with disability in China
  www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/nl/NL98.pdf

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