



Research Progress of Two-way Social Support for the Elderly

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ABSTRACT

This paper gives a comprehensive overview of the classification of social support, as well as the definition of two-way social support, its intrinsic meaning and corresponding measurement tools. At the same time, through a detailed review of the international and Chinese two-way social support research status, the current research hotspots and trends are explained. In particular, this paper points out the shortcomings of the research on two-way social support for the elderly in China. In view of these shortcomings, this paper proposes future research directions and development prospects in this field, in order to provide valuable references for further research and practice in this field.

KEYWORDS

Social Support; Two-way; Psychology; Reciprocity; Summarize.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing aging, the elderly are facing multiple challenges such as declining health status and social isolation. A number of studies have confirmed that improving the psychosocial resources of older people can not only effectively improve their quality of life, but also significantly promote their social inclusion and sense of gain. Among them, social support, as a key psychological resource, can significantly promote and improve the cognitive ability, physical health and happiness of the elderly, and is widely regarded as an important force to alleviate the negative effects of aging [1].

With the deepening of the research on social support, researchers have begun to recognize the two-way reciprocal nature of giving and receiving social support. A growing body of evidence suggests that excessive unilateral benefits may have negative health effects; Such support has positive psychological and health effects only when the recipient of support experiences a reciprocal relationship with the provider, as the recipient's psychological burden is correspondingly reduced [2]. The effects of social support often depend on the perceived balance between giving and receiving support in interpersonal relationships. Reciprocity is widely seen as an important determinant of social satisfaction, however, current research on reciprocity of social support is insufficient. At present, most domestic and foreign studies focus on the social support received by the elderly, but this study aims to comprehensively review the research status of two-way social support for the elderly in China, in order to provide a new direction for improving the social support network of the elderly.

2. CLASSIFICATION OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

According to the function of social support, House divides social support into instrumental support, emotional support, informational support and evaluative support [3]. Instrumental support generally refers to the help in material, money, manpower or other resources; Emotional support usually refers



to emotional experiences such as caring, trust, respect, a sense of worth, etc. Informational support refers to providing information that can help an individual solve a problem; Evaluative support refers to providing feedback information that can be used for an individual's self-assessment. On the basis of the functional classification of social support, House also classifies social support into giving social support and receiving (obtaining) social support according to the direction of support according to the different orientation of social support, that is, the difference between the identity of the subject as the provider and the recipient of support, all of which contain three factors: emotion, tool and information [3]. Jane Shakeshap-Finch et al. further simplified the functional classification of House. Giving social support includes giving instrumental support and receiving emotional support, and receiving social support includes receiving instrumental support and receiving emotional support. And developed a simple scale to measure 2-way support[4].

3. DEFINITION OF 2-WAY SOCIAL SUPPORT

At present, there is no unified definition of 2-way social support. Many scholars, such as Witkowski et al., believe that social support is an interactive force of mutual care, help and respect between people. Sarason further pointed out that social support is the mutual exchange of social resources among individuals, which aims to promote the psychological adaptability of individuals. Based on various literatures, 2-way social support can be understood as a network system composed of support recipients and providers and their supportive activities, which covers the two-way process of obtaining support from others and providing support to others.

4. MEASUREMENT OF 2-WAY SOCIAL SUPPORT

Shakespear-Finch published an article titled "Giving and Receiving Affective Measurement" in 2011, which introduced the bidirectional nature of Social Support. Importantly, the author developed the 2-Way Social Support Scale (2-way SSS). The 2-way SSS scale simultaneously evaluates four main dimensions of giving emotional support, giving instrumental support, receiving emotional support and receiving instrumental support[4]. The scale provides a measurement tool to compare social support research outcomes across different studies and different populations. Subsequently, Obst et al. simplified the original Scale in 2019 to form a simplified version of the Brief 2-Way Social Support Scale [5]. In 2022, Cui Yu et al in China carried out a sinicization of the scale, and conducted a reliability and validity test on the elderly group in the community as the research object, providing an evaluation tool for the research on 2-way social support for the elderly [6]. the revised Chinese version of the Brief 2-Way Social Support Scale includes two aspects: access to social support and provision of social support. It consists of 12 items in 4 dimensions, namely, receiving emotional support (1-3 items), giving emotional support (4-6 items), receiving tool support (7-9 items) and giving tool support (10-12 items). Each item was scored using the Likert 5-point scale, with the higher the score indicating the higher the level of 2-way social support. the revised Chinese version of the Brief 2-Way Social Support Scale has good reliability and validity [6].

5. INFLUENCING FACTORS OF 2-WAY SOCIAL SUPPORT

Sociodemographic factors: According to the study of Yanli Chen et al. age is negatively correlated with 2-way social support [7]. With increasing age, the ability of older people to provide and receive social support gradually weakens, resulting in lower levels of social support. On gender differences, research by Saito et al. found that women often take on the role of support provider in intimate relationships, which is associated with increased self-esteem and value in networking; Men, on the other hand, rely more on marriage for support[8]. In addition, the education level also has a significant impact on the social support of the elderly. The elderly with high education level are easier to provide

and obtain social support because of their higher comprehensive quality and extensive social communication. Economic level is also a key factor, and the elderly with high income occupy a dominant position in social support, but receive relatively less instrumental support. Factors such as occupational instability and self-payment of medical expenses will reduce the social support level of the elderly[9], and the higher the socioeconomic status, the higher the social support level of the elderly will be correspondingly increased.

5.1. Health-related Factors

The health level of the elderly directly affects their 2-way social support status. With the decline of health level, the ability of the elderly to provide and obtain social support will be weakened. Physical health affects the level of social support of the elderly. The elderly with good activity ability, active social participation, more communication with social groups, get more support from it, and also provide support for others. Exercise and fitness directly affect the health of the elderly, and the level of social support of the elderly who regularly exercise is significantly higher than that of the elderly who do not regularly exercise. Some studies have shown that the prevalence of chronic diseases is significantly correlated with the social support of the elderly, which is an important factor affecting the social support of the elderly. Qin Qirong et al. found that the social support level of the elderly with mobility disorders is significantly lower than that of the elderly with normal activities[10]. The elderly with poor physical health and self-care ability have less communication with others, are prone to negative emotions, have poor awareness and ability to seek and provide social support, and have a low level of social support.

5.2. Psychological Factors

Psychological factors: Research shows that the level of 2-way support provided and received by the elderly is positively correlated with their happiness. The elderly who can provide and receive support from others have higher happiness and higher satisfaction with life. The elderly are aware that pressure negatively affects their 2-way social support level. The more self-perceived pressure, the more negative emotions, the worse their social communication ability, and the lower their 2-way social support level. Moreover, studies have shown that the more support the elderly receive or give, the degree of depression will be greatly reduced, and the elderly with depression will be hindered in providing and seeking help, thus affecting the level of social support of the elderly[11].

5.3. Family and Social Factors

The social support received by the elderly mainly comes from family members, so the level of social support of the elderly with a good relationship between husband and wife and their children is relatively high, and the level of social support of the elderly with a spouse is higher than that of the elderly without a spouse [12]; The living situation affects the social support of the elderly, and the social support of the elderly living alone is worse than that of the elderly living with their spouses, children and parents [13]; Compared with empty-nesters, non-empty-nesters have a higher level of social support[14], which is related to the fact that empty-nesters receive less support from their children and are more prone to depression. Relatives and neighbors are the most important sources of social support for the rural elderly, compared with the urban elderly, the economic and medical level is higher, and in addition to the support of family and friends, but also can get support from social groups and other support, it is easier to get social support.

6. RESEARCH PROGRESS OF 2-WAY SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE ELDERLY

6.1. Research Progress of Two-way Social Support for the Elderly in International

In the research field of social support for the elderly, most scholars used to focus on the social support received by individuals, and explore the status quo and influencing factors of different ages, genders and social groups in this respect. However, in recent years, more and more attention has been paid to the research on the elderly's provision of social support, revealing the important role of supportive behavior in the life of the elderly. Back in the 20th century, American psychologist Alan Langer's research team carried out an insightful experiment. They took a group of elderly people aged 65-90 from a local nursing home and randomly assigned 47 of them to the experimental group. They were told early on that they could arrange their daily lives as they pleased. The nursing home prepared a number of plants, and they could choose one of them according to their preferences and take care of the plants. Another 44 were assigned to a control group, where they were told that someone would take care of every aspect of them; They also each had a plant, but someone would water it without their care. This interesting experiment lasted for three weeks. The results showed that the older people in the experimental group reported more happiness and a greater perception of happiness. The nurses' assessments (who were not aware of the study) also showed a significant improvement in physical health in 93 percent of the group. Only 21 percent of those in the control group reported a change for the better. This finding suggests that giving older people a sense of control and helping them achieve their goals is important for human health, and previous studies have shown that a sense of control in life is related to social support[15]. It is clear that providing support may be more important than receiving support in terms of enhancing self-worth and improving mental health, and that giving social support to others can promote individual health and longevity. Morten et al. 's study also verified that the elderly not only need support from family and friends, but also are willing to provide social support to others, and the reciprocity of such social support is of great significance to the physical and mental health of the elderly [16]. Thomas et al. 's study pointed out that both obtaining and providing social support can improve the well-being of the elderly, and the provision of social support plays A greater role[17].

With the deepening of research, scholars began to pay attention to the balance between providing and receiving social support. Inadequate social support can trigger negative emotions in patients, such as pessimism, loneliness, insomnia, anxiety, and depression, while excessive benefit may also have harmful effects on a person's health, such as guilt. Numerous studies have also reported a negative correlation between receiving large amounts of non-reciprocal support and physical health. Equity theorists emphasize that when individuals feel treated fairly, it contributes to well-being. This means that individuals experience happiness when they feel that they are getting in proportion to what they are giving in a relationship. Carr et al. found that men who get too much support can lose their autonomy, health and dignity[18].

In order to better understand the behavior of elderly people in providing and receiving social support, scholars proposed the term "support bank", which vividly depicts the long-term investment and return process of both parties in an intimate relationship. Many people of working age may provide support over time and do not begin to need and receive support in return until much later. At a young age, the individual acts more as a provider, giving help to others, and the recipient stores this support. As time passes or conditions change and the individual needs help, the former recipient will give it. The concept of balanced time concept is further proposed, emphasizing the importance of allocating time reasonably in different situations, which is of great significance for understanding the behavioral choices of the elderly in the process of providing and receiving social support. Podloger et al. further put forward the concept of balanced time concept, emphasizing the importance of allocating time reasonably under different situations, which is of great significance for understanding the behavioral choices of the elderly in the process of providing and receiving social support[19].

6.2. Research Progress on 2-way Social Support for the Elderly in China

In China, the research on social support for the elderly is gradually deepening, and past studies mainly focused on the social support received by the elderly and its influencing factors, revealing that the social support of the elderly is at a medium level and influenced by multiple factors such as individuals, families and communities. In recent years, researchers have begun to pay attention to the role of the elderly in the social support network not only as recipients but also as providers.

A number of studies have shown that elderly people receiving support can significantly improve their self-esteem and feelings of kindness, reduce loneliness, and enhance subjective well-being: Li et al. found that intergenerational relationship and family social support were negatively correlated with the depression level of the elderly, and family social support played a mediating role between intergenerational relationship and depression[20]. Using CLASS data for analysis, He et al found a significant correlation between pension and lower levels of depressive symptoms [21]. Among them, there are also studies involving 2-way social support and mental health: some studies show that two-way social support is closely related to depressive mood, and Shang Weiting et al. 's study shows that both 2-way caring support and emotional support have a positive effect on alleviating depressive symptoms [22]. Yang Yinan et al. 's study further found that three community services, namely chatting and boredom, recreational activities and dispute handling, were significantly positively correlated with the mental health of the elderly[23].

The social capital theory provides a new perspective for understanding the relationship between social support and depressive symptoms in the elderly. Zhao Han et al. pointed out that social participation of the elderly can increase social capital, which can alleviate the negative emotions of the elderly in the face of pressure through material, emotional and informational support provided by interpersonal communication[24]. And thus improve the health of the elderly. This finding further underscores the importance of providing and accessing two-way social support in the social support system for older adults.

The study by Zhao Tong et al. delves into the multi-dimensional impact of 2-way social support on aging expectations in older adults[25]. They selected elderly people over 60 years old from two local communities as research objects by cluster sampling method, and assessed them by using a self-prepared survey scale. The results showed that providing and obtaining instrumental support and emotional support had significant effects on the aging expectation of the elderly. This conclusion is consistent with the research of Xu Meijun, that is, the elderly not only need to obtain support, but also are willing to provide support to others to realize their self-worth[26]. The reciprocity of such social relationships has a positive effect on the physical and mental health of the elderly, and can enhance their happiness, so as to face the aging process more positively and maintain a high level of aging expectation.

7. THOUGHTS AND PROSPECTS

China has the largest elderly population in the world, and its aging process is particularly rapid. In this context, the importance of social support, as a key factor affecting the aging process, has become increasingly prominent. Past literature studies have revealed that depressive symptoms, psychological distress, resentment and other health problems in the elderly are often closely related to the lack of reciprocal interpersonal interaction. However, it is worth noting that although these studies have pointed out the potential impact of non-reciprocal interactions with certain significant others on health in old age, the application of 2-way social support in the field of geriatric depression has been poorly explored. In our social life, we often unconsciously label the elderly as vulnerable, and more emphasis is placed on proactively providing help to the elderly. However, from the perspective of health psychology, over-acceptance of support is not necessarily beneficial to the mental health of the elderly.

On the contrary, moderate 2-way social support, in which the elderly can actively contribute to society or others while receiving help, may be more conducive to the maintenance of their mental health.

Judging from the previous literature, 2-way social support is closely related to the mental health of the elderly, and among the psychological problems of the elderly, senile depression is the most common problem. The gradual decline of physical function often makes the elderly gradually withdraw in social life, lose the sense of control over the body or life, lose the sense of value, and then produce depression, which seriously affects the quality of life and social participation of the elderly. In China, which has a strong traditional culture of family care for the elderly, intergenerational support may be an important factor affecting geriatric depression. In the process of active aging in China, it is better to emphasize the 2-way social support for the elderly, provide the elderly with the best help and let the elderly actively participate in social activities, which can realize their own value and effectively prevent geriatric depression. Improve the quality of life and happiness of the elderly.

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