

# Good socioeconomic status means better health for the Chinese

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High levels of education and domestic income levels predicted better skills for Chinese people 65 years of age and older. Credit: 123RF

According to a doctoral dissertation being examined at the University of Helsinki, Chinese people of a higher socioeconomic status are on

average in better physical and cognitive condition at baseline. However, socioeconomic status does not protect people from age-related decreases in the ability to function.

The results indicate insufficient financial resources and healthcare services correlated with a decreased ability to function in China. High levels of education and domestic income levels predicted better cognitive skills for Chinese people 65 years of age and older. A high income level was also linked to higher ability to function in terms of daily chores.

The study used the Chinese Longitudinal Healthy and Longevity Survey (CLHLS) which was conducted in China between 2002 and 2011. CLHLS is the most extensive population-level study of Chinese people aged 65 years and older. It is based on internationally comparable survey forms, and yielded comprehensive data on [socioeconomic status](#), family structure and background, living arrangements, daily activities, lifestyle and health.

## **High education of children reduced male mortality**

According to the dissertation, cohabiting with a highly educated spouse or child was connected to lower [mortality](#). Highly educated spouses reduced mortality among seniors, particularly among men. Highly educated children were linked to reduced mortality, both for men and women.

"In addition, men and women who were less educated but who cohabited with more educated children, were healthier. It seems that the health impact of education among seniors is partially influenced by the education level of the children," says Lei Yang, doctoral candidate at the University of Helsinki.

People in the higher social classes were healthier on average and had lower mortality than lower classes. However, it is not clear whether these differences become less pronounced later in life.

"There is still limited data about this in China, even though it has the largest population of seniors in the world," Yang explains.

## **Family's social status has a high impact on senior health**

Unlike in western countries, Chinese seniors typically live with their children, and family members play an important role in their healthcare.

"The social standing of the family members seems to have even more impact on the health of the senior population in China than it does in western societies," Yang states.

The main objective of the study was to investigate the trajectories of health in later life by means of different indicators of socioeconomic [status](#), and to assess how the socioeconomic status of [family members](#) affects the [health](#) and mortality risk of elderly people in China. The specific aim was to find out whether elderly people with a higher socioeconomic status have better physical and cognitive functioning and a lower rate of decline with age.

Provided by University of Helsinki

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