

Effects of fertility change and son preference on intergenerational support for Chinese elders

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Abstract: This dissertation examines the effects of fertility change and son preference on intergenerational support for Chinese elders. The prospect of rapidly aging populations has raised concern throughout the world. The issue is particularly urgent in China because its population is aging at a much more rapid rate than what developed countries have typically experienced thus far and the changes are occurring before the institutional structures necessary to accommodate an aged society have been erected. Meanwhile, the base (the quantity and gender composition of children) for intergenerational support, which is a vital source of old-age support in China, is undergoing dramatic change due to substantial reduction in fertility and a sharp increase in sex ratio at birth in recent years. In this study, a series of categorical models (logit, multinomial logit, and two-part models) are employed to examine the effects of quantity and gender of children on intergenerational support in the form of living arrangements, informal care, and financial support. Further, simulations are conducted to predict the prevalence of various types of support and the amount of upstream transfers for future elders. The results indicate that intergenerational support hinges primarily on whether an elder has any living children and the gender composition of children. The effects of the quantity and gender of children also differ significantly between urban and rural areas in that sons have a stronger positive effect in rural areas and daughters have a stronger effect in urban areas. However, the quantity and gender effects of children do not vary across different education levels, except in financial support. The simulations reveal that the prevalence of intergenerational support will remain the same in the near future but the amount of upstream transfers from children is expected to decline. The findings indicate that intergenerational support is generally sustainable under fertility change and son preferences. However, rapid urbanization may affect intergenerational support for rural elders in China.

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