

Institutionalization among the elderly in Japan and China: A comparative study

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Specific Aims

Japan and China have been experiencing rapid changes in the care of the aging population in their societies and the challenges of taking care of the elderly. Institutional aging care drew attention as the nuclear family becomes more common, increases in the number of aging family members puts burden on society. Previous research has revealed that functional limitations and availability of adult children are the two key elements increasing the possibility of institutionalization among the elderly. What is not known is how factors affecting institutionalization among the elderly is divergent across countries. The overall hypothesis is that factors influencing institutionalization among the elderly are similar in Japan and China, but the types and degree of the factors influencing institutionalization varies between the countries. We will address the overall hypothesis by pursuing three specific aims:

Specific Aim 1: Examine the impact of family structure on institutionalization

Hypothesis: 1) Due to the spreading trend of nuclear family and the fact that people live longer, the proportion of elders living alone or only with their spouse is increasing, while the percentage of those living with adult children declines.; 2) The previous living arrangements affects later institutionalization

Specific Aim 2: Assess the impact of community and economic resources on institutionalization

Hypothesis: 1) The elderly who use more community resources such as home-based services, day-care service, and short-term overnight services are less likely to be institutionalized. 2) The elderly who have more economic resources are less likely to be institutionalized.

Specific Aim 3: Analyze the impact of age cohorts on the possibility of institutionalization

Hypothesis: Economic and socio-demographic factors and normative desirability account for the differences in the impact of age cohorts on the possibility of institutionalization in Japan and China

The expected outcome is that institutionalization among the elderly and the attitudes toward aging care and institutionalization vary, not only by individual level factors, but also by country factors. This study is significant because it will develop a new collaboration with Drs. Nanako Tamiya, MD, PhD, University of Tsukuba and Hidehiro Sugisawa, PhD, Obirin University who are leading scholars in aging research in Japan. This study is innovative by comparing institutionalization among the elderly in Japan and China which currently has few previous studies. The expected impact of this study is that it will open the door for further collaborative and comparative research projects on aging in the U.S., Japan and China. The investigator (Dr. Kamimura) and collaborators (Drs. Tamiya and Sugisawa and Ms. Wenjing Mo, a doctoral student in sociology, from China) have worked together to prepare for this proposal and have an appropriate environment to accomplish the overall objective, access to the necessary data sets, and sufficient expertise and experience. The data that will be used in this study include the 71-month claims data on long-term care insurance program service use in one Japanese city (years 2000 to 2006), which are available at the University of Tsukuba, the survey on social support among the elderly in Japan and China from Obirin University in Japan (1995), and the Chinese Longitudinal Healthy Longevity Survey (2002-2009).

Significance

This study is significant because it will develop new interdisciplinary research collaboration with Dr. Nanako Tamiya, MD, PhD, University of Tsukuba, and Dr. Hidehiro Sugisawa, PhD, Obirin University in Japan. Dr. Tamiya is a physician and a Professor of Health Service Research, and one of the leading scholars in aging research in Japan and has strong interest in developing research collaborations with the University of Utah. She would like to found a center similar to the Center on Aging at the University of Tsukuba and hopes this project will be a stepping stone for her endeavor. Dr. Sugisawa is a Professor of Gerontology and also a well-known scholar in aging research in Japan and has been working with Dr. Tamiya, and is familiar with the aging issues in China as well as Japan. The Principal Investigator, Dr. Akiko Kamimura is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Utah since 2011 and has academic background in health management and policy, and social work. In addition, Ms. Wenjing Mo, a PhD student in Sociology at the University of Utah, will join the team. The new interdisciplinary collaboration will improve scientific knowledge about institutionalization among the elderly in Japan and China if the proposed aims are achieved.

Methods

This study will use three existing data sets: 1) Data from the University of Tsukuba in Japan; 2) Data from Obirin University in Japan and China; and 3) The Chinese Longitudinal Healthy Longevity Survey (CLHLS). The Tsukuba data and the CLHLS will be merged to test each hypothesis addressed on all specific aims. The Obirin data will be supplementary used for Specific Aim 2 and 3 to describe the social support of the elderly in Japan and China in 1995 and compare with the more recent circumstances using meta-analysis.

Preliminary Results

The Long Term Care Insurance (LTCI) launched in Japan for more than a decade ago. The impact of LTCI on informal care giving and other related fields can be significant. We are interested in the factors influencing the possibility of institutionalization before and after the introduction of LTCI. Previous research shows that sufficient/insufficient informal caregiving, and caregiver's capability, rather than the older adult's declining function, were the key risk factors of institutionalization. As LTCI provides diverse home-based services for family care givers based on the different levels of care needs, it is worthwhile to explore factors related to institutionalization among those elders who reported to have used LTCI services.

With a 71 months (2000-2006) claim data from a city in Japan, we found that after the launch of LTCI, the characteristics of care recipients and care givers, and the care giver's preference were the key risk factors for institutionalization. We further explored the association between living arrangement and care givers' preference. The findings suggest that it is important to develop formal support system for family care givers since the family structure has been dramatically changed in Japan – fewer family members are available to take care of the elderly.