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Family Connections May Become a Double-Edged Sword Impacting U.S. Chinese Older Adults' Well-being

Chicago, IL, July 13—Family relationships may both benefit and harm the mental health among U.S. Chinese older adults, suggested by new studies published in *The Journal of Gerontology: Medical Sciences Volume 72: S1 (2017)*.

Chinese populations consider family as the major source of protection against hardships, such as immigration. Adult children fulfilling filial obligations and grandparents providing care for grandchildren are traditional ways to strengthen the family connections within Chinese families. However, little was known about how these traditional values affect the mental health of Chinese older adults within immigrant families.

Drs. Man Guo, Ling Xu, and XinQi Dong from the PINE study interviewed over 3,000 U.S. Chinese older adults to examine factors for family conflicts, and the association between grandchildren caregiving, filial discrepancy, and depression. Main findings include:

- Older adults who did not feel their children fulfilling the cultural expectation of filial obligations were more likely to have both family and marital conflict.
- Caring for grandchildren may be beneficial for mental health, but only if caregiving responsibilities are not burdensome.
- Chinese older adults may have high risk of depressive symptoms when expecting more care from children than they receipt.

Our studies indicate that the intergenerational relations may become a double-edge sword that benefit or harm the mental health of Chinese older adults, as immigration has changed the pattern of filial obligations fulfillment and grandparent caregiving.

In order to improve the well-being of Chinese older adults, Dr. Guo said, “Educational programs may be designed to help both younger and older immigrants to have conversations about expectations, challenges, and adaptations of family relations in the new society. Developing ways of enhancing the independence of older adults while preserving their close relations with families will be the key for such planning.”

Dr. Xu added, “Additionally, though a positive impact of grandchild care on psychological well-being was found for Chinese American grandparent caregivers, both grandparent and middle parent generations should be aware that grandparent caregiving is of a choice, not an obligation. When burden is perceived in caring for grandchildren, specific efforts are needed to identify and reach out to grandparent caregivers who are in need of help.”

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