

## Social Risk of Population Aging and Its Countermeasures

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**Abstract:** Rapid population aging is one of the important national conditions of China. The number of the elderly is large, aging progress is accelerating, showing advanced aging trend. How to cope with the challenge of population aging, prevent and control the risk of aging society has become an important task for China to promote national governance and social governance. The aging social risks include elderly poverty, social exclusion, disease and disability, mental disorder. The potential causes of aging social risk include structural factors, institutional factors, developmental factors and individual factors. It is a complex systematic project to deal with the social risks of the aged. We should take measures from many aspects to improve the elderly security system and meet the reasonable needs of the elderly.

### Introduction

Population aging is an important sign of human civilization, and also brings severe challenges to economic and social development. China's population aging reflects the characteristics of large population base, rapid aging, unprepared for the elderly, urban and rural inversion. The population aging will bring huge demand for old-age security, and will also face many uncertainties and risks. How to deal with the challenge of population aging, how to prevent and manage the social risk of population aging has become an important task in the process of economic and social development of China. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed that we should actively respond to the population aging, and create a social governance pattern of co-governance and sharing.

### The Main Social Risks of Population Aging

In the process of China's social transformation, industrialization, urbanization, modernization, population aging and changes in family structure are advancing and influencing each other. Traditional social risks and modern social risks are intertwined. The social risks faced by population aging are mainly reflected in the following aspects:

#### Risk of the Elderly Poverty

When an individual enters the old age, due to the weaken and disappear of working ability, the ability to obtain income will decline and disappear, they have to rely on external support or institutional security to spend their old life, which needs support of government, family and society. The accelerating process of population aging, the rising of the old-age dependency coefficient has brought great pressure on the elderly. In recent years, the central and local governments have actively strengthened fiscal investment and social security system construction, and gradually improved the pension security standards, which has played a positive role in ensuring basic life of the elderly, improve life quality of the elderly. However, due to some reasons, there are still more absolute poverty population and more relative poverty population in some areas. Therefore, we need to actively deal with risks and challenges of the elderly poverty in the future.

#### Risk of Social Exclusion

Providing for the aged is not only an economic problem, but also a social problem. In the process of economic and social development, it should reflect the inclusion of the elderly, include equal treatment of all the elderly with local household registration, as well as the inclusion of the permanent elderly, especially the elderly from abroad. As one of the vulnerable groups, the elderly is facing greater life risks, but the ability to deal with the risks is relatively weak, so it needs more attention from the government and society. As the social exclusion of the local elderly, it mainly refers to the social exclusion of the elderly in the process of social policy, social security and public service provision. The physical and mental needs of the elderly cannot be fully considered, the social participation of the elderly is not considered in social activities, it is easy for the elderly to have a sense of social exclusion. The social exclusion of the elderly from other places is more noteworthy. Nearly one-third of the permanent residents in Beijing are migrants, and there are more than 250000 permanent migrants. If the non-permanent migrants are included, the number is even larger. As the old people from other places in Beijing, they are the weak in the weak. Their education level, income level and social status are relatively low, their wealth and resources are limited, and their ability to cope with life risks is weaker.<sup>[1]</sup>

### **Risk of Disease and Disability**

With weakening of physiological function of the elderly, the body immunity is declining, and the risk of disease is increasing. The increasing number of disabled elderly makes the social and economic burden more and more serious. Under the background of imperfect medical security system and nursing service system, the pressure of family old-age service is intensified. In the context of population ageing, the risk of disease and disability of the elderly aggravates the pressure of national medical security, which makes the government have to increase the investment in medical security and life care for the elderly. The medical expenses of the elderly have become an important expenditure of individuals and families. According to the data of the national urban and rural elderly population survey, about 10% of the elderly pay about 25% of their income, and 5% of the elderly pay more than 50% of their total income.<sup>[2]</sup> At the same time, the scale of government expenditure on medical and health care is relatively large. According to preliminary accounting, the total national health expenditure in 2015 is expected to reach 4058.77 billion yuan, of which 1253.3 billion yuan (30.88%) is government expenditure on health care.□

### **Risk of Mental Disorder**

"The spiritual needs of the elderly are derived from the imbalance of subjective mentality caused by the change of social environment conditions. It is a state of desire caused by maintaining and restoring the imbalance of subjective mentality and realizing enrichment, satisfaction and dignity."<sup>[3]</sup> It has been found that loneliness of the elderly is on the rise with the increase of age, and has a close relationship with their health.<sup>[4]</sup> Compared with adults, the elderly has more urgent spiritual needs, eager to be respected, eager to participate in social activities. Especially the special elderly groups such as the empty nest elderly, the elderly who lost their independence and the elderly who were lonely and widowed in the city have stronger spiritual needs than the general elderly. With the improvement of economic development level, the growth of residents' income, the continuous improvement of pension system, the economic security and material demand of the elderly have been alleviated, and the problem of spiritual demand has become more and more prominent.

## **The Causes of Social Risks of the Aged**

**Structural Factors.** Since the reform and opening up, China has accelerated the transformation of social structure and system, actively promoted the process of urbanization, marketization and modernization, from the traditional agricultural society to the modern industrial society; strengthened reform of urban and rural economic system, from the planned economic system to the socialist market economic system; steadily promoted the process of urbanization, and accelerated the pace of population flow; population policy transformation makes the family structure core and small. Social transformation is a long process, it is not easy to achieve the goal of modern social

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□Data source: 2016 China Health and family planning statistical bulletin.

development. In the process of social transformation, because there is no ready-made experience to follow, rapid social change is easy to lead to uneven distribution of interests, aggravating the imbalance of interests, and the low social maturity enlarges the probability of risk generation and the difficulty of risk governance. [5] Social transformation and aging influence each other. Aging aggravates the complexity and difficulty of social transformation, and brings more challenges, risks and crises.

**Institutional Factors.** Scientific and reasonable social systems and policies are important tools to solve social problems and serve social development. They help to regulate the behavior of relevant subjects, coordinate the interest relationship, prevent and resolve relevant social risks. However, the unscientific and unreasonable system not only cannot solve the problems, but also may breed problems and encourage risks, which may become an important source of social risks and even the fuse of social crisis. The elderly poverty and lack of old-age services are ostensibly due to the economic reasons, lack of investment and the unfairness of the economy. In essence, they are due to the imperfection of relevant systems and policies, forming invisible or tangible social exclusion. Some scholars pointed out that "in China, to achieve social integration among all groups, we should not only cross the invisible wall, but also the visible wall. In most cases, the strong physical wall is insurmountable." [6] In fact, it reflects the social exclusion caused by institutions and policies and the social conflicts and risks that may be caused by them. From the existing social policy and public service system, the situation is not ideal, lack of systematic planning and scientific demonstration, both quantity and quality are difficult to meet the needs of the elderly, and it is difficult to cope with the risk of aging.

**Developmental Factors.** The main contradiction in our society has been transformed into the contradiction between the people's growing needs for a better life and the unbalanced and inadequate development. The demand level of the people is escalating day by day, and all kinds of demands of the elderly are growing day by day, including not only the basic life security needs, but also the social participation, service needs, spiritual needs and other aspects. The needs of the elderly are increasingly diversified, the standards and levels of needs are also improving, and the requirements for service quality are higher. The elderly's rights awareness and group awareness are increasing, which will further test the improvement of aging policy and public service ability of the government. Compared with the growing needs of the elderly, the elderly security system development and the elderly service system is relatively lagging behind, which is difficult to meet the needs of the elderly. In the process of reform and opening up, the security and service ability of the elderly has been significantly improved. However, due to the different needs and income ability of different elderly, the services satisfaction will be different, benefits improvement will be different for different elderly, resulting in a sense of relative deprivation and unfairness, which is easy to lead to social opposition and conflict. The important factor of risk is easy to become the fuse of social crisis. When individuals compare their real situation with reference objects, find themselves at a disadvantage, they will have a sense of relative deprivation. [7]

**Individual Factors.** The individual factor comes from the individual, which reflects the personality problem, not the group problem or the social problem. Social risk is directly derived from the individual's perception on relevant social problems. Under the influence of social structure, social system and policy, social environment and other factors, it may transform individual risk into group risk and social risk. From the perspective of the elderly, the elderly has similar physical and mental characteristics, but individual needs are still very different. Social policies need to consider common needs and individual differences, enhance the scientific and accuracy of systems and policies. At present, the unstable expectation of the elderly leads to the spread of public anxiety and uneasiness. Any prediction or judgment about the gap of pension income and expenditure will cause the public to question this system. Many people worry that they will not receive enough pension in the future, which will affect the elderly's life, and then lose confidence in the system and the government as guarantor. [8] The unfairness of the old-age service system will also make the elderly have a sense of social unfairness. The elderly lack of trust in the government and society, and their perception of social injustice are the important sources of the aging social problems, risks and

crises.

## **How to Deal with the Risk of Aging Society**

**Vigorously promote the elderly security system construction, build a comprehensive, fair and sustainable elderly security system.** It mainly includes economic security, medical security, service security and mental security for the elderly. In terms of economic security, we should adhere to the principle of giving priority to social insurance, combining assistance, insurance and welfare, improve the current pension system, establish a "unified foundation, multiple layers" pension system, establish a fair and sustainable pension system. Further promote integration of various pension systems, improve the overall arrangement level of the basic pension system, realize the national overall arrangement of the basic pension system, explore establish national pension system or national annuity system that everyone enjoys equally, establish the universal old-age allowance system, and enhance the fairness of pension system. In the aspect of medical security, we should further improve the compensation level, explore payment mode reform, reduce medical burden of the elderly; at the same time, we should improve the medical service system, improve the medical service level at the grass-roots level, improve the service attitude of doctors, so as to provide the elderly with efficient, high-quality, low price, convenient and accessible medical services. In terms of service security, we need to comprehensively strengthen old-age service system construction, focus on develop home-based old-age service and community old-age service, improve the service capacity of old-age service institutions, promote development of private old-age service institutions by means of government purchase of services, strengthen old-age service talents training, and improve the specialization level of old-age services. In terms of mental security, we should strengthen mental intervention through funds and facilities, prevent psychological and mental crisis of the elderly, establish a comprehensive mental security mechanism, including psychological promotion mechanism, material (facility) support mechanism, cultural and educational mechanism, and social control mechanism. [9]

**Strengthen legal system construction for the elderly, formulate fair and inclusive policies for the elderly.** Whether improvement of the elderly security system or protection of the rights and interests of the elderly, we need perfect laws and regulations. We need to continue to improve the law on protect rights and interests of the elderly, refine relevant provisions, clarify the responsibilities of different subjects, and enhance the operability of the law. We should explore to formulate "Regulations on pension system" or "pension system law" from the national level, carry out top-level design and system planning of pension system. On the basis of relevant laws and regulations, combined with local reality, we should formulate fair and inclusive social policies for the elderly. It is required to deal with relationship between the elderly with household registration and the elderly with permanent residence, and treat them fairly. It is necessary to focus on the special elderly groups with high risk and weak ability, such as the empty nest elderly, the elderly without independence, the elderly in poverty and the elderly suffering from accidents.

**Strengthen financial investment, establish and improve pension treatment adjustment mechanism.** The satisfaction of the elderly's needs, prevention and resolution of aging social risks depend on government investment. At the same time, we need to optimize the direction and structure of financial investment, which embodies the responsibility and fairness of the government, focuses on the special elderly groups, focuses on meet the basic living needs and basic service needs of the elderly, focuses on the key areas of aging risks, such as strengthening financial support for basic pension, basic medical insurance for the elderly, old age allowance and social assistance for the elderly, nursing services for the elderly, construction of basic public service facilities for the elderly, etc. We should reasonably divide the responsibilities between the central government and local governments, between different levels of governments, improve the transfer payment mechanism of central fiscal, and clarify the input responsibilities of local governments. We will set up various adjustment mechanisms for the old people's security benefits, so as to dynamically coordinate them with economic development level, wage level, price level and other factors, so that the elderly can share the fruits of reform and development fairly, and reduce their sense of relative

deprivation.

**Establish a mechanism for identification, assessment and early warning of ageing social risks.** There are relatively more researches on social risk early warning and assessment in China, but lack of researches on ageing social risk warning and assessment. The aging social risk will become the normalization social risk in the future, so it is necessary to establish the identification, evaluation and early warning mechanism of aging social risk. We should explore and establish mechanism of risk identification, assessment and early warning of aging social risk. Carry out in-depth theoretical research on social risk and aging. Based on the interest demands and practical problems of the elderly, we need to comprehensively use all kinds of statistical data and survey data for analysis, establish an aging social risk index system, especially use big data thinking, methods and technologies to carry out the identification and assessment of aging social risk. In addition to giving full play to the role of the government, need the participation of society actors, cultivation and exploration social capital, establish a mechanism for integration of social resources,<sup>[10]</sup> build a multi social support system.

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