

Social Relations and Health of Korean Elderly Women: An Analysis of the Differences across Age Groups

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1. Aim

Adults entering old age experience significant changes in their social relationships, which become narrower in breadth compared to the relationships of youth. These changes often become the factors that affect the lifestyles and subsequently the health of the elderly. Various studies assert that positive social relationships, often defined as social support, are positively associated with better health in later life. The objective of this study is to examine the extent to which the association between different types of social relationships (formal or informal) and multiple dimensions of health outcomes varies by age groups among Korean elderly. It has focused specifically on classification by age, which allows for broad groupings, within the context of the elderly female population.

2. Data and Variables

The data used in our analysis came from the 2008 second wave survey of the Korean Longitudinal Study of Ageing (KLoSA). In this analysis, the dependent variable is health status, and the independent variable is social relationships. For self-rated health and symptoms of depression, we performed regular regression analysis with the scores as continuous variables, and for contraction of one or more of the 9 chronic diseases, we performed a logistic regression analysis.

3. Results

Social relationships have an important effect on the health of women in early, middle and late old age. But this effect varies widely across the different age groups. The findings show that having a relationship with spouse or partner does not have as sustained an effect as having relationships with children, the effect of which is evident until late old age. They also show that formal relationships resulting from participation in various activities have a closer association with health status than informal relationships do. When the formal relationships resulting from participation in leisure or other social activities are maintained, they appear to be positively associated with health until late old age. The results of our study differ somewhat from those of previous studies, which suggested that as adults approach the latter stages of old age, relationships with family members and other kinds of informal relationships are increasingly important. This study was able to examine the issue of health in terms of the various dimensions of health, and in this respect, progressed beyond the limitations of previous studies on social relationships and later life, which failed to recognize the multidimensional nature of health.

3. Reference

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