

Leisure Activities and Cognitive Health among the Middle-Aged and Older Chinese

University of Florida

Min Li

University of Florida

Barbara Zsembik

Central Univ of Finance & Economics Cuntong Wang

1. Aim

With no effective pharmaceuticals available to treat cognitive decline, efforts are increasingly aimed at identifying non-pharmacological approaches. One non-pharmacological approach that has been widely examined is participation in leisure activities. Numerous studies found that higher level social activities is related to better cognitive health outcomes -ranging from a slower rate of cognitive decline to a lower risk of incident MCI and dementia (Bourassa, Memel, Woolverton, & Sbarra, 2015; Hughes, Flatt, Fu, Chang, & Ganguli, 2013; Lee & Kim, 2016; Zhu, Qiu, Zeng, & Li, 2017; Zunzunegui, Alvarado, Del Ser, & Otero, 2003). However, association between different patterns of leisure activities and cognitive health is not established yet. More importantly, it is not disentangled how gender conditions the role of leisure activities in shaping cognitive health in later life.

2. Data & Methods

This study uses data from China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) to examine level of leisure activity engagement and cognitive impairment. It limits to samples of respondents who were cognitively intact in 2013 and use binary Logit models to estimate how frequency of social and cognitive leisure activities in 2013 is associated with risk of cognitive impairment in 2015. Gender stratified models were also fitted to examine how gender moderate the association between leisure activities and cognitive health.

3. Results

Respondents with higher frequency of social leisure activities tend to have lower risk of cognitive impairment, when control variables (demographic factors, socioeconomic factors, and health conditions) are held constant. The association between social leisure activities and cognitive health is stronger among males than females.

4. Conclusion

Leisure activity participation is protective of cognitive health. What's more, male have greater cognitive benefit from frequent participation in social activities. It might be speculated that men, in contrast to women, gain from being active in social activities as it is the type of activity that extends the variation of activities that males participate in, whereas that was probably not the case for many women.