Neighborhood, Social Engagement, and the Elderly's Depression

in Shanghai

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This study investigates the neighborhood effect on depression and its mechanism among the elderly population in Shanghai, focusing on the role of social engagement and social cohesion. Using the data from Shanghai Urban Neighborhood Study (SUNS) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), we show that social engagement and social cohesion are processes through which neighborhood characteristics shape the elderly's subjective well-being. The elderly who live in disadvantaged neighborhoods do not report less social interaction or lower social cohesion, a finding different from that reported in Western societies. Housing policy in the pre-reform period that integrated work and housing formed unique Chinese neighborhoods. Economically disadvantaged neighborhoods may have strong social ties among residents. In addition, elderly centers in the neighborhood could enhance social cohesion by providing the elderly with opportunities for volunteer participation. Social cohesion, in turn, leads to a lower rate of depression.