

Living alone and subjective well-being among the young and middle-aged in China

Abstract

Over the past decades, China has been experiencing a significant increase in the number and proportion of young and middle-aged people living alone (one-person households). Living alone is becoming a noticeable living arrangement in China, a country traditionally characterized by the prevalence of extended families and marriage. However, the understanding of how it relates to one's subjective well-being, particularly for the young and middle-aged, is limited. To address this gap, our study used six waves of cross-sectional data from the Chinese General Social Survey (2010, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2018) to explore how living alone shapes subjective well-being (i.e., self-rated happiness) among the young and middle-aged (20-59). It also explores how gender, marital status, and education levels moderate this relationship. The findings reveal that living alone is negatively correlated with happiness. Furthermore, moderation analysis shows that the negative correlation is stronger among men (vs. women), never-married men of rural and urban origin (vs. their married counterparts), and college-educated men of rural origin (vs. their primary-educated counterparts). However, compared to married women, living alone is associated with an increase in happiness for unmarried women of urban origin and even significantly boosts happiness for divorced women of urban origin. This study offers valuable insights for developing policies aimed at improving the well-being of the expanding group of individuals living alone in China.

Keywords: living alone, happiness, young and middle-aged, CGSS, gender differences