

# **Disappointed or Considerate? The Effect of filial discrepancy on Life Satisfaction of older adults in Rural China**

## **Introduction**

Aging is sweeping the world. Enhancing life satisfaction in older adults have important practical significance in an aging society. However, the imbalance of population structure brought about by aging and fewer children has changed the basis of traditional filial piety. Contemporary China's demographic transformation, cultural transformation, economic transformation and intergenerational transformation have brought multiple impacts to traditional filial piety. The gap between the filial piety expectations of rural elderly people for their children and the actual filial support they receive has created filial discrepancy. Due to the structural lag in conceptual transformation in real changes and the widening gap in filial piety, rural elderly people are facing practical impacts and psychological challenges.

In order to compensate for the above research limitations, this study attempts to reveal the impact and mechanism of filial discrepancy on the life satisfaction of older adults in rural China. Specifically, this paper focuses on the following research questions: (1) What is the distribution and characteristics of filial discrepancy of older adults in rural China? (2) Does filial discrepancy affect older adults' life satisfaction? (3) What is the mechanism of filial discrepancy affecting the life satisfaction of older adults in rural China?

## **Theoretical framework**

Filial piety is a set of intergenerational obligations of children to serve and respect their parents. In the intergenerational perspective, the filial discrepancy is the gap between subjective filial expectation and objectively accepted filial support. Filial expectation is a social attitude that adult children are obliged to satisfy the needs of older parents, especially the expectation of their children's filial support, which reflects general social norms and focuses on the specific expectations of older adults for their children's appropriate behavior; filial support is the combination of the intergenerational obligations that parents actually receive during intergenerational interactions and their respect for their parents. Intergenerational interactions in which parents actually receive intergenerational support from their children. In this paper, we take rural Chinese older adults as the object of study, and define older adults' filial discrepancy as “the gap between the level of filial expectation for children and the level of filial support they actually receive” .

Multiple discrepancies theory lays the groundwork for the influence of multidimensional filial discrepancy on older adults' life satisfaction. Multiple discrepancies theory suggests that an individual's satisfaction is affected by multiple discrepancies, with the gap between what the individual has and what the individual wants being the strongest determinant of psychological well-being. The gap between what individuals have and what they want is the factor that has the greatest influence and the strongest determining power on the psychological well-being of individuals. Multiple discrepancies theory is controversial in two aspects, one of which is in the way of measuring discrepancies. Multiple discrepancies theory adopts subjective measurements of discrepancies, which seems to measure multiple dimensions of the same phenomenon, and therefore some scholars believe that there is an autocorrelation or tautology component in Multiple discrepancies theory, thus questioning its utility. thereby questioning its utility.

Subsequent studies have revised Multiple discrepancies as subjective-objective differences, operationalized the discrepancy as a dispersion and indirect indicator of the difference between respondents' values and their performance, and verified that it still exerts an influence on subjective well-being. In this paper, the measure of filial difference is operationalized as the fallout between subjective filial expectation and objectively received filial support. Second, the intrinsic pathways of subjective and objective discrepancies on life satisfaction have yet to be revealed. Multiple discrepancies theory shows that the perception of the discrepancy between what is actually wanted and what is received plays a mediating role in the process by which other discrepancies affect life satisfaction. Since perception is an intermediate mechanism between stimulus and response, this study hypothesizes that filial piety perception plays a mediating role between discrepancies and life satisfaction. Therefore, this paper adopts filial perception as the mediating variable of filial discrepancy affecting life satisfaction.

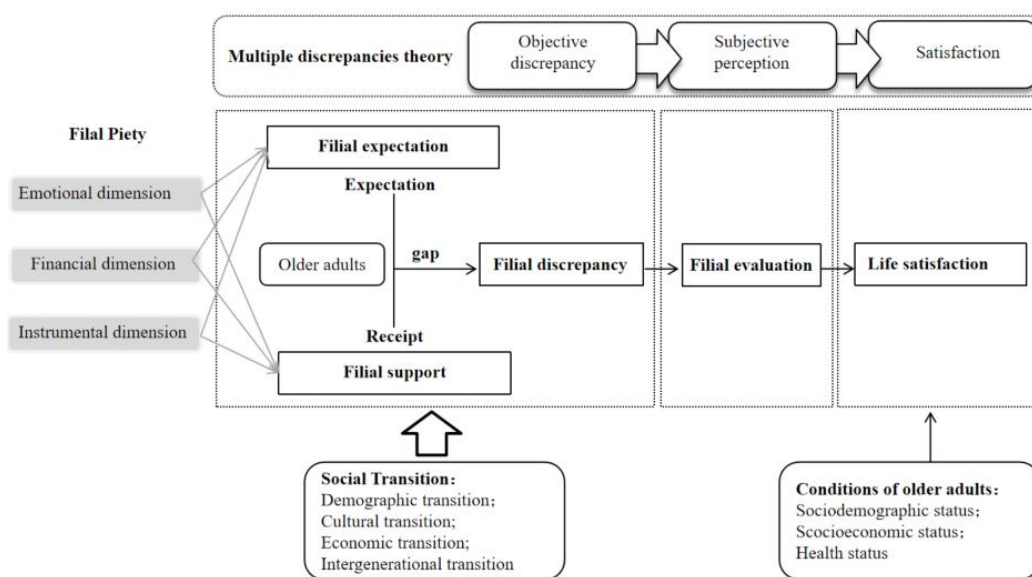


Figure1 The theoretical framework of filial discrepancy and life satisfaction of older adults.

To summarize, this study constructs a multilayered filial piety theoretical framework based on multilayer discussion theory under the perspective of older parents. Vertically, filial piety is divided into filial expectation and filial support, and the discrepancy between the two is filial discrepancy, and the perception of filial piety is filial evaluation; horizontally, filial discrepancy is divided into three dimensions: emotional, economic, and instrumental. According to the multiple discrepancy theory, the gap between different dimensions of filial expectation and filial support constitutes the filial discrepancy, which affects the life satisfaction of older adults, and the perception of filial piety may play a mediating role in it.

## Results

The descriptive analysis of filial discrepancy of older adults reveals that older adults face a mismatch between subjective expectations and actual support in filial piety. Nowadays, older adults still have balanced high expectations in emotional, economic, and institution, but there are significant differences in filial support in emotional, economic, and institutional dimensions. On the affective dimension, filial expectation and filial support were well matched in general; however, on the economic and instrumental dimensions, the level of filial support was generally

lower than the level of filial expectation, with the lowest level of fulfillment of instrumental filial piety. The three-dimensional joint distribution of the filial discrepancy yields that most of the combined distribution of the three-dimensional filial discrepancy occurs in the positive part of the instrumental discrepancy, and the high-frequency response surface spreads out along the diagonal between the emotional filial discrepancy and the economic filial discrepancy. The spread unfolds. Most older adults face both high levels of realization of filial expectation in the emotional dimension and low levels of realization of filial expectation in the economic and instrumental dimensions, and the realization of emotional and economic filial dimensions show a tendency to promote each other.

The regression results show that an increase in emotional filial discrepancy causes a decrease in life satisfaction of older adults. Financial filial discrepancy causes a decrease in life satisfaction of older adults. Instrumental filial discrepancy has no significant effect on life satisfaction of older adults. Discrepancy has no significant effect on life satisfaction of older adults. The mediating effect analysis was carried out by stepwise regression method, and the results of stepwise regression method were verified by testing 1000 samples randomly selected from the original data by Bootstrap method, and it was found that filial evaluation played a partial mediating role in the process of emotional filial discrepancy affecting older adults' life satisfaction in the financial filial discrepancy affects older adults' life satisfaction, plays a main mediating role in the process of financial filial discrepancy affecting older adults' life satisfaction, and plays a masking role in the process of instrumental filial discrepancy affecting older adults' life satisfaction. The specific path of influence is shown in Figure 2.

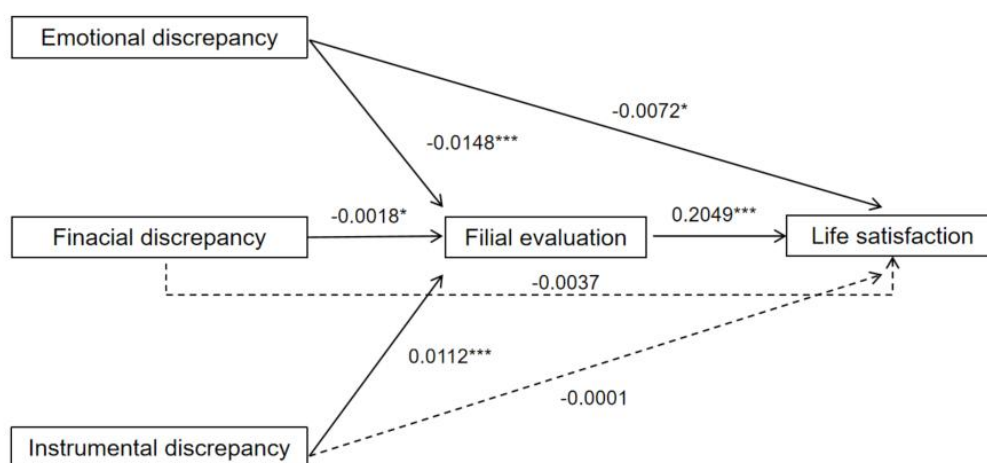


Figure 2 The path of filial discrepancy on the life satisfaction of rural older adults.

## Discussion

Emotional filial discrepancy has a negative effect on life satisfaction of older adults, and filial appraisal plays a partially mediating role. From the perspective of the path of action, emotional filial discrepancy can either act directly on life satisfaction or act on life satisfaction through the mediating effect of filial appraisal. This suggests that emotional filial discrepancy can both act directly on older adults' life satisfaction through emotional ties; it can also reduce older adults' life satisfaction by lowering older adults' perception of their children's filial piety, generating a sense of relative deprivation of their children's disappointment, and then lowering older adults' life

satisfaction.

The financial filial discrepancy has a negative effect on the life satisfaction of older adults, and the filial evaluation plays a major mediating role. From the perspective of the path of action, economic filial discrepancy, on the other hand, works mainly by changing the subjective perception of filial piety toward children. Under the implicit emotional expression habit in China, economic support is an important way to convey emotions between parent and offspring. Therefore, economic disparity affects the life satisfaction of older adults by influencing their subjective perception of filial piety. This suggests that financial filial discrepancy affects older adults' life satisfaction primarily through subjective feelings about their children's perceived filial piety, rather than through a direct effect on older adults' objective material improvements.

Instrumental filial discrepancy does not have a significant effect on the life satisfaction of older adults, in which filial appraisal plays a masking effect. Instrumental filial piety as a whole is in a situation in which the level of support fails to meet the level of expectation, but as the instrumental discrepancy decreases, i.e., the extent to which instrumental expectations are met increases, filial piety perceptions instead decrease, which in turn leads to impaired satisfaction. It has been shown that the quality of children's interactions with their older parents is more important than the frequency of interactions for current rural older adults. This implies that it is possible that only high quality of care and emotional interactions with the institutionalized filial piety can improve the psychological well-being of older adults. At present, the family is still the main scenario for older adults in China, but as the proverb says, "There is no filial son in front of the bed of a long illness", in the new era, when children face a heavier burden of care, they may not be able to guarantee the quality of instrumental support and the respect and love that older adults need, while at the same time increasing the frequency of care. Older adults with the respect and love they need. Instrumental support that only meets basic needs is accompanied by intergenerational conflicts and reduces older adults' perceptions of filial piety. Therefore, the realization of this low-quality instrumental filial piety rather reduces the perception of filial piety of older adults and fails to enhance the life satisfaction of older adults.

Filial piety culture shows the same direction of change in practice and influence: in the change of practice, instrumental filial piety and financial filial piety are difficult to match the expectation of older adults, while emotional filial piety basically realizes the expectation of older adults; in the change of influence, emotional filial piety shows the same direction of change in life satisfaction of older adults; in the change of influence, emotional filial piety shows the same direction of change in life satisfaction of older adults. Discrepancy shows the most significant influence on life satisfaction, while the influence of instrumental filial discrepancy on life satisfaction is no longer significant. This indicates that filial piety has gradually shifted from the instrumental dimension to the emotional dimension. In rural China, where Confucianism is strong, although the practice of some dimensions of filial piety culture has been impacted by modernization, filial piety culture still shows strong influence in rural China, while the change of practice and influence is more synchronized with a weaker structural lag, which further illustrates the strong vitality and adaptability of contemporary filial piety culture.