Sons and Daughters: Effects of Children's Out-migration on Intergenerational Support in Rural China

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Background According to the 1% population sampling survey in 2005 by National Statistics Bureaus of China, the volume of Chinese rural-to-urban migration has reached 147 million, that is more than one tenth of the total Chinese population and three tenth of Chinese rural population were involved in rural-to-urban migration in 2005. As families are the major support source for older individuals in rural areas, massive out-migration of young labor may undermine the traditional family system of support and significantly affect the care of older parents remaining in rural areas. A few studies have examined the association between children’s out-migration and support of rural older parents in developing countries. However, the most relied on cross-sectional data, and the cause and effect can be confused in cross-sectional studies.

Objective In Chinese rural families, children's gender plays crucial role in their support for older parents, and therefore large gender division in the family support for older parents in Chinese families should be expected. Although there are many studies referring the intergenerational support at present, few studies have addressed the relationship of adult children's out-migration and support of older parents based from a gender-based perspective. The purpose of this study is to examine whether sons’ or daughters’ migration has a differential impact on the support to older parents left in rural areas.

Method Using data from the baseline and follow-up surveys of “Well-being of
Elderly in Anhui Province, China” conducted in 2001 and in 2003 respectively by the Institute for Population and Development Studies of Xi’an Jiaotong University, in conjunction with the University of Southern California, this paper employs the logistic model to examine the gender differences in the effect of out-migration on division of intergenerational support in rural China.

**Findings** The results show that the division of family support in rural China has not changed thoroughly under the out-migration of adult children, however, the gender differences on intergenerational supports between sons and daughters are reduced. While migrant daughters have greater probability of increasing financial support to their elderly parents, which narrows the gap between sons and daughters; migrant sons have less probability of increasing instrumental support to their elderly parents, which also narrow the gender difference of instrumental support. And as migrant daughter are more likely to increase the emotional support to their parents, the gap between sons and daughters on intergenerational emotional support is further widened.

**Conclusion** Although our analysis reveals that the traditional patrilineal pattern of old-age support is still dominant in rural society, out-migration of rural females helps to enhance the status of women in family and society, and to weaken the gender difference in old-age support.
Key Words: intergenerational support, out-migration, gender, China