

AB040. Urbanisation, relocation and mental health of elderly farmers and the changes during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

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Background: Rapid urbanisation has caused a considerable elderly population to relocate from rural countryside to urban neighbourhoods. This study examines the impact of built environment change on their health and the inequality aggravated by living density and built environment configuration.

Methods: The primary data is from a longitudinal study on urbanisation and health of relocated farmers in Suzhou, China. The baseline survey was conducted from June to November in 2019 from two groups, relocated farmers (N=1,053) and the control group of farmers still living in the rural countryside (N=1,597). A Follow-up survey (N=367) was undertaken from Oct to December 2020, with interviews to understand the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on their health, perception, and lifestyle.

Results: The results from the preliminary analysis showed that both depression and cognitive impairment rates were higher among rural farmers than relocated farmers and associated with the more inferior self-perceived overall health of rural farmers. Relocated farmers generally had an overall higher cognitive score, maybe because of the need for memory and information as essential abilities in city life. The pandemic saw an increase in the cognitive score of relocated farmers, likely because of intensive exposure to information from mass media. The follow-up survey did not find a significant increase in depression. Instead, interview findings showed the possible positive contribution of the

pandemic to the perceived health of relocated farmers, because of the improved public health environment.

Conclusions: This study found a mild impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health but more significant lifestyle changes, including reduced time on daily walking, social activities, and social network, associated with increased time spent indoors, within neighbourhood, time on TV and mobile phone. These behaviours may aggregate obesity and mental illness in the long-term and should be prioritised in post-pandemic public health intervention measures.

Keywords: Built environment; depression; cognitive abilities; satisfaction; lifestyle

Acknowledgments

Funding: This research is funded by National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC 51808451) Elderly-friendly Environment Making during Rapid Urbanisation-Longitudinal Empirical Study of the Impact of Built-Environment on Health.

Footnote

Conflicts of Interest: The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Ethical Statement: The authors are accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved. The research ethics approval was granted by Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University Ethics Committee (EXT-19-06).

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doi: 10.21037/jphe-21-ab040

Cite this abstract as: Chang Y, Sun G, Zhu H. Urbanisation, relocation and mental health of elderly farmers and the changes during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. J Public Health Emerg 2021;5:AB040.