



## The debilitating effects of chronic diseases among the oldest old in China



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### abstract

**Objectives:** The aims of this study were to assess the current sharp rise in chronic diseases and disabilities with advancing age, and to examine the debilitating effects of chronic diseases among the oldest old in China.

**Study design and outcome variables:** This study used data from four waves of the Chinese Longitudinal Health and Longevity Survey (CLHLS) conducted in 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2011. The sample comprised 2137 older adults who were interviewed in 2002 and re-interviewed in the following waves. Cross-tabulations were run to show the rise in chronic disease and disability with age. Ordinal logistic regression was run to examine the debilitating effects of these diseases in terms of the ability of the oldest old to perform activities of daily living.

**Results:** The prevalence of chronic diseases rose sharply with age. The prevalence rate of six major diseases increased between 38% (respiratory diseases) and 533% (neurological disorder) among respondents who were re-interviewed nine years later. Cardiovascular diseases were the most common. Neurological disorder and cancer were less common, but had the most debilitating effects on patients. Overall, 10.0%, 3.1% and 3.1% of the respondents were disabled by cardiovascular, musculoskeletal and sensorial diseases, respectively. Ordinal logistic regression showed that neurological disorder had the strongest debilitating effects, followed by musculoskeletal and cardiovascular diseases among 2137 older persons who had survived and were followed up from the base year (2002) through 2011.

**Conclusion:** The rapid rise in chronic diseases has resulted in an increased burden of disability among the oldest old in China. There is a need to improve health care systems for the prevention and management of chronic diseases.

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