Changes in psychosocial well-being of older people in Hong Kong: Findings from four cross-sectional population-wide surveys from 2017 to 2020

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Background & Objectives:
- Hong Kong, a densely populated city in China, has the longest life expectancy in the world (males: 83.2 years; females: 87.9 years, 2021).
- Despite plenty of efforts to monitor life expectancy and physical health, changes in psychosocial well-being among older people in Hong Kong have been rarely examined and documented.
- Hong Kong witnessed social unrest in 2019 and the outbreak of COVID-19 disease in 2020. However, few studies have investigated their impact on psychosocial well-being in older people.
- Tracking changes in the psychosocial well-being of Hong Kong’s older people is important for the understanding of the progression of healthy ageing and health equity.
- Therefore, based on four cross-sectional population-wide surveys in Hong Kong from 2017 to 2020, the current study aimed to examine:
  - Changes in various indicators of psychosocial well-being in older people
  - If sociodemographic characteristics moderated these changes over the years

Methods:

Sample: Hong Kong residents aged ≥ 60 years recruited from a random sample of households via population-wide telephone surveys conducted annually from 2017 to 2020

Psychosocial well-being:
- Psychological distress: Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6)
- Loneliness: 3-item UCLA Loneliness Scale
- Life satisfaction: ‘Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days?’

Sociodemographic characteristics: age, gender, educational attainment, working status, living arrangement, housing type, & subjective socioeconomic status

Analysis: Changes in psychological well-being measures across years (2017 as baseline) were tested with linear regression analyses
- Sociodemographic characteristics as covariates
- Sampling weights were incorporated
Whether the changes in scores were modified by sociodemographic variables was assessed with the respective interaction term with year

Results:
- Regression analyses suggested:
  - Increases in psychological distress from 2017 to:
    - 2019 (B = 0.56, p = .030, 5% increase)
    - 2020 (B = 1.63, p < .001, 13% increase)
  - Decreases in life satisfaction from 2017 to:
    - 2019 (B = -0.23, p = .026, 3% decrease)
    - 2020 (B = -0.55, p < .001, 9% decrease)
  - Unclear changes in loneliness (p = .235)

- Moderation analyses suggested:
  - Across the years, more prominent increases in psychological distress among those with higher education attainment (p for interaction = .048)
  - Tertiary education vs no formal education: +22%
  - Senior secondary vs no formal education: +23%

Conclusions:
- A deterioration in mental health and life satisfaction in Hong Kong’s older people was evident from 2017 to 2020, with more prominent changes observed from 2019 and onwards.
- Our findings call for interventions and policies to promote the psychosocial well-being of its older people, as well as continual assessments to monitor the short-term changes and long-term trends in multiple facets of well-being.

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