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Incidence of depressive symptoms and prospective relationship of depressive symptoms with baseline risk factors among mid-aged and elderly community-dwelling Chinese adults

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Complete List of Authors:	Wen, Yue; West China Hospital, Sichuan University, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery Liu, Chunjuan; West China Hospital, Sichuan University, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery Liao, Jing; West China Hospital, Sichuan University, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery Yin, Yiqiong; West China Hospital, Sichuan University, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery Wu, Dongmei; University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, The Clinical Hospital of Chengdu Brain Science Institute, MOE Key Lab for Neuroinformation; The Fourth People's Hospital of Chengdu & Chengdu Mental Health Center, Psychiatric Research Laboratory
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3 **Incidence of depressive symptoms and prospective relationship of depressive symptoms**
4 **with baseline risk factors among mid-aged and elderly community-dwelling Chinese adults**
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8 Yue Wen, Chunjuan Liu, Jing Liao, Yiqiong Yin*, Dongmei Wu*
9

10 Correspondence should be made to:

11
12 Dongmei Wu, PhD, RN
13

14 Department of Nursing, The Clinical Hospital of Chengdu Brain Science Institute, MOE Key
15

16 Lab for Neuroinformation, University of Electronic Science and Technology of China
17

18 Huli West 1st Lane, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, 610036.
19

20
21 Tel: 86-28-69515754
22

23
24 E-mail: wudongmei_2001@163.com
25

26
27 Yiqiong Yin, BN, RN

28 Chief Superintendent Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital,
29

30
31 Sichuan University
32

33 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, 610041.
34

35
36 Tel: 86-28-85422877
37

38
39 E-mail: yiqiong489@163.com

40 *: Yiqiong Yin and Dongmei Wu were co-corresponding authors for this manuscript.
41

42 The full names, institutions, city, and country of all other co-authors:
43

44
45 Yue Wen, BN, RN

46
47 Supervisor Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan
48

49
50 University

51
52 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: wenyue19820327@163.com
53

54
55 Chunjuan Liu, BN, RN
56

1
2
3 Supervisor Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan
4
5 University

6
7
8 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: liuchunjuan2002@163.com

9
10 Jing Liao, MSN, RN

11
12 Senior Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan University

13
14 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: m15982277765@163.com

15
16 Yiqiong Yin, BN, RN

17
18 Chief Superintendent Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital,
19
20 Sichuan University

21
22 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: yiqiong489@163.com

23
24 Dongmei Wu, PhD, RN

25
26 Assistant Professor, Department of Nursing, The Clinical Hospital of Chengdu Brain Science

27
28 Institute, MOE Key Lab for Neuroinformation, University of Electronic Science and Technology
29
30 of China

31
32 Huli West 1st Lane, Chengdu, China, 610036. Tel: 86-28-69515754. E-mail:

33
34
35
36
37
38 wudongmei_2001@163.com

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Abstract

Objectives. The purpose of this study was to examine the incidence of depressive symptoms, and determine if baseline risk factors conferred a risk for incident depression over time in a nationally representative sample of mid-aged and elderly Chinese population.

Design. This study was a secondary analysis of a prospective cohort from a nationally representative sample.

Setting. Community samples in 28 provinces of China were recruited from the baseline survey of the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study. A four-stage, stratified, cluster probability sampling strategy was used, which included 10,257 households with members aged 45 years or older and their spouse.

Participants. A total of 11,533 participants free of depressive symptoms at baseline were identified, and 10,288 were followed in either the second or the third waves of surveys. The current analyses were conducted among the 10,288 participants.

Primary and secondary outcome measures. Depressive symptoms were measured by the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale short form.

Results. The findings showed that the incidence of depressive symptoms in a 4-year follow-up was as high as 22.3%. The incidence was higher in rural areas and women. Furthermore, longer sleeping duration and better self-perceived health status were both associated with lower risk of depressive symptoms. On contrary, having diabetes and chronic kidney disease at baseline increased the risk of depressive symptoms. However, baseline body mass index was not associated with the onset of depressive symptoms in this population.

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3 **Conclusions.** The findings of this study highlight the importance of developing an appropriate
4 screening test to identify depressive symptoms for those who are vulnerable and ensure these
5 individuals can receive early interventions for depression.
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10 **Key words:** depressive symptoms, incidence, mid-aged and older adults, China
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For peer review only

Strengths and limitations of this study

- Since the sample was representative of community-dwelling mid-aged and older Chinese adults, the study results can be generalized to mid-aged and older Chinese adults.
- This is the first study in China to estimate the incidence of depressive symptoms in a nationally representative population in China.
- Depressive symptoms were based on self-reports instead of clinically diagnosis. Therefore, information bias may be present. However, with longitudinal design, information bias in the current study was very likely to be non-differential.
- This study was a prospective analysis of baseline risk factors with depressive symptoms at follow-up, and no causal associations between these predictors and depressive symptoms can be drawn from the analysis.

Introduction

Depression has been recognized as a leading cause of disability and a major contributor to disease burdens globally ¹. An estimated 322 million adults had depression in 2015 worldwide, with nearly half of these people living in the South-East Asia and Western Pacific regions ². In China, about 4.2% adult population was estimated to be depressed, and the prevalence of depression reached a peak in older adulthood ². With fast economic growth, mid-aged adults are exposed to a high-stress lifestyle, which is thought to contribute significantly to an increase in mental health disorders in susceptible people ¹. Older adults, on the other hand, face noteworthy challenges to their life, including loss of independence, loss of social support due to the death of a spouse or weakened family connectedness (traditionally referred to as ‘filial piety’), financial difficulties, and medical vulnerability ³. Late-life depressive symptoms increase risk for significant impairment in social function ³, dementia ⁴, declined quality of life ⁵, and suicide ⁶. They further complicate the prognosis of concurrent medical problems by increasing physical disability and decreasing motivation and adherence to prescribed medications and/or exercise or rehabilitation programs ^{7,8}.

Although depression has come to be regarded as the common cold of psychosocial functioning in Western culture, mental disorders are still viewed as degrading not only to the patient, but also to the entire family in Chinese culture ⁹. In addition, although effective interventions have been developed to alleviate symptoms of depression, depressive symptoms are often overlooked among the elderly, since most of them mistakenly consider these symptoms to be part of the normal ageing process ¹⁰. Therefore, older adults may not actively seek medical treatment and leave their depressive symptoms undiagnosed or untreated. As persons aged 45 or older will increase from 32% to 51% of the total population from 2010 to 2040 in China ¹¹,

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3 reliable and up-to-date estimates of the proportion of this population affected by depressive
4 symptoms are a key ingredient of effective health policy, planning, and evaluation.
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8 Recently, a number of population-based studies have estimated prevalence of depressive
9 symptoms among mid-aged and older Chinese adults ^{3 10 12 13}. Given that all these studies were
10 cross-sectional, the incidence of depressive symptoms among mid-aged and older Chinese adults
11 was not clear. Furthermore, despite a myriad of studies that examined a number of health
12 conditions associated with an increased risk of mid- and late-life depressive symptoms, including
13 chronic diseases, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status ^{3 13-16}, the
14 prospective relationships between these health conditions and depressive symptoms have not
15 been well understood in this population. Such prospective relationships may provide further
16 evidence on how baseline conditions may be predictive of depressive symptoms in the follow-up
17 than cross-sectional analysis, especially given that these health conditions are expected to be a
18 great challenge to an increasing aging population, and can often co-occur with depressive
19 symptoms which may make these conditions worse ³. A better understanding of these
20 associations may also provide information that is useful in identifying patients who are
21 vulnerable to mid-life or late-life depressive symptoms, and proactively assessing and treating
22 modifiable risk factors during primary health care service.
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42 Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the incidence of depressive
43 symptoms among mid-aged and older adults in China, and determine if baseline sleep duration,
44 body weight, self-perceived health status, and chronic conditions conferred a risk for incident
45 depression over time, using baseline and four years of follow-up data from the China Health and
46 Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS).
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53 **Methods**

Study Design

This study was a secondary analysis of prospective data from the CHARLS. The CHARLS is a nationwide, community-engaged, population-based epidemiological study of Chinese adults aged 45 years or older. The purpose of the CHARLS was to obtain detailed information regarding the dynamics of retirement and how it interacts with health, health insurance, and economic well-being. The CHARLS collects detailed information on a wide range of domains, including demographics, health status, physical measures, employment history, pension insurance, retirement, income, expenditures and assets¹⁷. The current study used data from baseline, the second, and the third waves of surveys.

Participants

The CHARLS national baseline survey was conducted in 28 provinces (Tibet, Ningxia, and Hainan were not included) across the country from May 2011 to March 2012. It was a survey of 10,257 households with members aged 45 years or older and their spouse, for a total of about 17,708 individuals. A four-stage, stratified, cluster probability sampling strategy was used to select eligible participants¹⁷. Details of the sampling procedure are published elsewhere¹⁸. The response rate for the survey was over 80% (94% in rural areas and 69% in urban areas)¹⁷. The baseline cohort of the CHARLS participants was followed up every two years with the same survey questionnaires and biomedical measures¹⁷. The second wave of the CHARLS was fielded between July 2013 and January 2014. Subjects in this study used the same inclusion and exclusion criteria as the original study. A total of 11,533 participants free of depressive symptoms at baseline were identified, of whom 9,329 were followed in the second wave of the CHARLS in 2013-2014, 9,157 were followed in the third wave survey in 2015-2016, and 10,288

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3 were followed in either the second or the third waves of surveys. The current analyses were
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5 conducted among the 10,288 participants.
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7 **Patient and Public Involvement**

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10 In the current study, we used de-identified data from the CHARLS with no direct
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12 involvement of or interaction with participants in the design, recruitment or conduct of the
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14 original cohort study.
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16 **Variables, Definitions, and Measures**

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19 **Depressive symptoms.** The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-
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21 D) short form was used to measure depressive symptoms¹⁹. The CES-D short form consists of
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23 ten items, and each item was rated on a four-point Likert scale with answers ranging from 0
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25 (rarely or none of the time) to 3 (most or all of the time) with the total possible summary score of
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27 0 to 30. The time frame for the CES-D short form refers to the week prior to interview. Item 5
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29 (“feeling hopeful about the future”) and 8 (“feeling happy”) were reversely scored before
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31 analysis. Higher scores corresponds to higher levels of depressive symptoms, and a score of 12
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33 or higher has been used as the cut-off point for depressive symptoms²⁰.
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38 The CES-D short form has been validated among a subsample of 742 CHARLS
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40 participants aged 60 years and older, showing adequate psychometric properties²⁰.
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42 Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the two-factor model had the best fit. Depressive affect
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44 and somatic retardation were loaded as the first factor, and positive affect was loaded as the
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46 second factor. The two-factor structure varied across both genders in multi-group analysis ($\chi^2=$
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48 144.13, $p<0.001$). R^2 coefficient was used to measure the reliability of each item, and some of
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50 them differed between both gender groups. For example, depressive affect and somatic
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3 retardation accounted for 37% and 64% of the variance in the depression indicator (“bothered”)
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5 for the males and females, respectively ²⁰.

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7 **Measure of health conditions associated with depressive symptoms.** These factors
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9 included chronic conditions, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status.
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11 Information on chronic conditions was primarily based on self-reports except hypertension and
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13 diabetes. Participants were asked if they had been diagnosed with any of the following health
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15 conditions: arthritis, dyslipidemia, cancer (excluding minor skin cancers), liver diseases (except
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17 for fatty liver, tumors or cancer), cardiovascular diseases (heart attack, coronary heart disease,
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19 angina, congestive heart failure, or other heart problems), stroke, kidney disease (except for
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21 cancer or tumor), stomach or other gastrointestinal diseases (except for tumor or cancer),
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23 memory-related diseases, and asthma. Participants answered “yes” to these questions were
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25 defined as having these doctor-diagnosed conditions.
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31 Hypertension was defined based on the most current guidelines from the American Heart
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33 Association, which have lowered the threshold of hypertension cut-off points to 130/80 mmHg ²¹.
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35 A systolic blood pressure measurement of 130 mmHg and higher, or a diastolic measurement of
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37 80 mmHg and higher, or 130/80 mmHg and higher, or taking antihypertensive medications
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39 including modern western medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, or using other treatment for
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41 hypertension was considered as having hypertension ²¹. Blood pressure was measured three
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43 times (approximately 45 seconds apart) for each participant on the left arm in sitting position,
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45 using an electronic blood pressure monitor (Omron™ HEM-7112)²².
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50 The diagnosis of diabetes was based on the current guidelines from the American
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52 Diabetes Association (2018). Readings of 126 mg/dL or higher for fasting blood glucose \geq 126
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54 mg/dL, or readings of 200 mg/dL or higher for random blood glucose, or readings of 6.5% or
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3 higher for glycated hemoglobin, or use of insulin, or taking oral hypoglycemic medications
4 including traditional Chinese medicine, modern western medicine, or other diabetes treatment
5 was considered as having diabetes ²³.
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10 Weight was measured to the nearest 0.1 kg using a digital scale (Omron™ HN-286,
11 Yangzhou, China) on an even, uncarpeted surface, with participants removing heavy outer
12 clothing. Height was measured without shoes to the nearest 0.1 cm using a stadiometer
13 (Seca™213, Hangzhou, China). Body mass index (BMI, weight in kilograms divided by height
14 in meters squared) was calculated from the participants' weight and height.
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19 Self-perceived health status is a powerful indicator of the health status of elderly people
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22 ²⁴. It was measured based on self-reports to the following question, “Would you rate health
23 as...”, with five response options provided: excellent, very good, good, fair, and poor.
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28 Sleep duration in hours was collected using a question, “During the past month, how
29 many hours of actual sleep did you get at night (average hours for one night)? (This may be
30 shorter than the number of hours you spend in bed.)”
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35 **Covariates.** Factors that could confound the main association were identified a priori
36 from current literature. Covariates included age, gender ³, education ²⁵, and marital status ^{3 26}.
37 Consistent with a prior CHARLS publication ²⁷, education was categorized as illiterate or no
38 formal education, some primary school but can read and write, primary school including home
39 schooling, and middle school or above. Marital status was grouped as married versus not married.
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43 44 45 46 47 **Ethical Considerations**

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49 The CHARLS was approved by the Ethical Review Committee. The current study is a
50 secondary analysis of the de-identified CHARLS public data. The Ethics Review Committee
51 granted the current study exemption from review.
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Statistical Analysis

Incidence of depressive symptoms. The incidence of depressive symptoms was analyzed taking into account the complex survey design and nonresponse rate in both estimates and the corresponding standard errors (SEs). Inverse probability weighting method was used to account for differential response rates. As described by the CHARLS guideline, response status (Yes or No) was first regressed on a dummy for gender, a dummy for age information, age (if known), a dummy for marital status, and a dummy for villages among all the eligible individuals in responded households. Then the inverse of the predicted probability from the regression model was calculated and rounded to one decimal²⁸. Participants were categorized into 5-year age groups. SAS PROC SURVEYFREQ procedure was used to obtain the overall and gender specific incidence of depression among all the participants and by the 5-year age groups. In addition, overall and gender-specific depression incidence was estimated by rural and urban areas. We estimated the incidence of four outcomes of depressive symptoms: having depressive symptoms in the second wave of survey (2013-2014); having depressive symptoms in the third wave of survey (2015-2016); ever having depressive symptoms in the second or the third waves of survey; and consistently having depressive symptoms in both waves.

Prospective analysis. Baseline characteristics of the participants were summarized as frequency and percentage for categorical variables and mean and standard deviation or median and interquartile range for continuous variables. Associations of baseline health behaviors, including chronic conditions, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status, with the incidence of ever having depressive symptoms in 4 years of follow-up were evaluated by a multivariate logistic regression model, while controlling for all covariates as mentioned above. Odds ratios (ORs) and the corresponding 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were reported.

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3 The SAS 9.4 (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, North Carolina) was used to perform the analyses. All the
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5 p values were two-sided, and $p < 0.05$ was considered significant.
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7 8 **Results**

9 10 **Sample Characteristics**

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12 A total of 10,288 participants aged 45 years or older were included in the estimate of
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14 depressive symptoms incidence. As shown in Table 1, the average age of all participants was
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16 58.5 years and roughly half participants (49.3%) were women. Most of the participants (73.3%)
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18 lived in rural areas and 60.6% participants had education of primary school or above. The
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20 majority of participants (90.0%) were married or living with a partner at the time of data
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22 collection. About a third of the participants (31.5%) were current smokers and 17.9% were
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24 current regular drinkers. Participants had an average BMI of 23.7 kg/m². The mean duration of
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26 sleep per night was 6.7 hours, and less than 20% of participants perceived their health as very
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28 good or excellent. The mean CES-D short form score was 5.1 at baseline.
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32 33 **Incidence of Depression**

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35 As shown in Table 2 and in Figure 1, the incidence of ever having depressive symptoms
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37 in 4 years was 22.3% (95% CI: 21.3%-23.3%). The incidence was much higher in rural areas
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39 than that in urban areas (25.7% vs. 15.3%). Women had higher incidence of depressive
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41 symptoms than men (27.9% vs. 16.7%). There is no clear pattern of the incidence of depressive
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43 symptoms over age groups (Figure 1). The incidence was highest among the 65-70 years of age
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45 group and lowest among the 45-50 years of age group.
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49 50 **Baseline Risk Factors And Incident Depression**

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52 As shown in Table 3, sleeping duration and self-perceived health status were both
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54 inversely associated with the risk of depressive symptoms. Specifically, participants with an hour
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3 longer of sleeping had a 10% (95% CI: 7%-13%, $p < 0.0001$) lower risk of developing depressive
4 symptoms in 4 years follow up. Compared to individuals who perceived their health status as
5 poor, those who perceived their health status as fair, good, very good, and excellent had 42% (95%
6 CI: 39%-52%), 47% (95% CI: 36%-57%), 64% (95% CI: 54%-72%), and 62% (95% CI: 43%-
7 74%) lower risk of developing depressive symptoms, respectively. In addition, two chronic
8 conditions, diabetes (OR=1.19, 95% CI: 1.00-1.42, $p=0.04$) and chronic kidney disease
9 (OR=1.37, 95% CI: 1.05-1.79, $p=0.02$) were associated with higher risk of depressive symptoms.
10 However, baseline BMI was not associated with the onset of depressive symptoms in this
11 population (OR=0.99, 95% CI: 0.97-1.01).
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24 Discussion

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26 Through analysis to data of a nationally representative sample of mid-aged and older
27 Chinese adults, we found that the incidence of depressive symptoms in a 4-year follow-up was as
28 high as 22.3%. Large disparities in the incidence of depressive symptoms were observed
29 between rural and urban areas and between men and women. Furthermore, longer sleeping
30 duration and better self-perceived health status were both associated with lower risk of
31 depressive symptoms. On contrary, having diabetes and chronic kidney disease at baseline
32 increased the risk of depressive symptoms. However, baseline BMI was not associated with
33 depressive symptoms in this population.
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44 This is the first study that examined the incidence of depressive symptoms in a nationally
45 representative population in China. Our study found that in 4 years of follow-up, as high as 22.3%
46 of the mid-aged and older Chinese adults developed depressive symptoms. Using the same
47 database, a recent study reported that the prevalence of depressive symptoms at CHARLS
48 baseline survey was up to 26.2%¹². Collectively, these findings revealed that depressive
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3 symptoms were a major public health challenge in China, and intervention programs should be
4 developed to reduce the burden of depressive symptoms. Furthermore, large disparities were also
5 observed between rural and urban residents and between men and women. In particular, women
6 and residents living in rural areas were at a higher risk of developing depressive symptoms.
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12 Individuals with longer sleep duration had lower risk of depressive symptoms. This
13 finding is in line with previous studies ^{29 30}. Sleep disorders are often the presenting and core
14 symptoms of depression ³¹. However, treatment of depression did not resolve sleep symptoms
15 which may confer a greater risk for depression recurrence and relapse ³¹. Therefore, sleep
16 deprivation should be at least considered as an early indicator of depressive symptoms.
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19 Individuals with sleep deprivation should be aware of their high risk of depressive symptoms and
20 manage to improve the length of their sleeping.
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29 Better self-perceived health status also reduced the risk of depressive symptoms in the
30 current study. The finding is consistent with studies among other populations ³². Self-perceived
31 health is a powerful indicator of the overall health status of elderly people ²⁴. Many factors,
32 including sociodemographic characteristics, chronic disease, functional status, social
33 relationships, neighborhood environment, and nutrition pattern, were all important determinants
34 of self-perceived health ²⁴. These factors are also associated with depressive symptoms. The
35 current study adjusted most of the factors, except for functional status, social relationship, and
36 nutrition pattern, which were not available in the CHARLS database. Still, poorer self-perceived
37 health status was significantly associated with higher risk of depressive symptoms. Future
38 studies additionally controlling for those factors will help to evaluate the contribution of those
39 factors on the associations of self-perceived health status with depressive symptoms.
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3 Furthermore, such study may also help delineate whether self-perceived health status may
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5 represent other factors that may lead to depressive symptoms.
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8 Among 12 chronic conditions, baseline chronic kidney disease increased the risk of
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10 depressive symptoms at follow-up. Although the underlying mechanisms have not been well
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12 understood, some authors suggested that the psychosocial and biologic changes in dialysis may
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14 explain this relationship³³. In addition to chronic kidney disease, baseline diabetes also
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16 conferred a higher risk of symptoms of depression over time in this study. Similar results were
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18 reported in a meta-analysis of 11 studies, which found that people with diabetes at baseline had a
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20 24% higher risk of developing depression at follow-up compared to those without diabetes³⁴. In
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22 addition, high prevalence of depression among people with diabetes and/or chronic kidney
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24 disease has also been observed in cross-sectional studies³⁵⁻³⁷. In concordance with these findings,
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26 this study added further evidence in a population of mid-aged and older Chinese population that
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28 compared to other chronic conditions at baseline, the two conditions were more likely to be
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30 associated with depressive symptoms over time.
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35 Overweight/obesity is well established to interfere with mental health, with depressive
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37 symptoms being more common among overweight/obese individuals than their normal-weight
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39 counterparts, especially in overweight/obese women^{38,39}. A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies
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41 further confirmed this relationship, in which excess weight at baseline increased a higher risk for
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43 incident depression at follow-up⁴⁰. In contrast to these findings from Western and European
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45 countries, using data from a prospective survey of a large, representative sample of mid-aged and
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47 elderly community-dwelling residents in Mainland China, we did not find a relationship between
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49 baseline BMI and subsequent depressive symptoms over time. These inconsistent findings may
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51 suggest that because participants in the current study were predominantly low in BMI at baseline
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3 (mean BMI was 23.7 kg/m²), their likelihood of experiencing depressive symptoms may have
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5 been lower compared to those participants reported in Luppino et al. (2010). However, these are
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7 preliminary findings that need to be further investigated in future prospective studies in this
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9 population.
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12 As the first study focused on the estimation of the incidence of depressive symptoms, the
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14 study has important strengths. First, since the sample was representative of community-dwelling
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16 mid-aged and older Chinese adults, the study results can be generalized to mid-aged and older
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18 Chinese adults. Second, a Chinese specific cut-off point of the CES-D short form score for
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20 depressive symptoms has been used, and the cut-off point was validated among middle-aged and
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22 older Chinese adults²⁰. Therefore, our study provided more reliable estimate of the incidence of
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24 depressive symptoms. Third, strict quality control measures, including GPS matching, data
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26 checking, recording and checking interviews, and calling back participants, were implemented at
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28 every stage of the study to ensure data quality and reliability.
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33 There were also some limitations in this study that should be acknowledged. First,
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35 depressive symptoms were based on self-reports instead of clinically diagnosis. Therefore,
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37 information bias may be present. However, with longitudinal design, information bias in the
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39 current study was very likely to be non-differential. Since non-differential misclassification
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41 generally bias the association estimates towards the null, our study findings were more robust.
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43 Second, nighttime sleep duration was also measured based on self-reports. The use of self-
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45 reported measures in the CHARLS surveys may have biased study results, since participants may
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47 consistently under- or overestimate their nighttime sleep duration⁴¹. Objective or direct
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49 measures of sleep duration should be used to increase precision and accuracy of self-report
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51 assessment. Finally, this study was a prospective analysis of baseline risk factors with depressive
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3 symptoms at follow-up, and no causal associations between these predictors and depressive
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5 symptoms can be drawn from the analysis.
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8 The findings of the current study have important implications for clinical practice. Health
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10 care professionals are especially encouraged to address the needs for better mental health in
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12 elderly population ⁴². In view of the high incidence of depressive symptoms (22.3%) among mid-
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14 aged and elderly Chinese, the findings of this study highlight the importance of developing an
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16 appropriate screening test to identify depressive symptoms for those who are vulnerable and
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18 ensure these individuals can receive early interventions for depressive symptoms. The screening
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20 test should include items such as areas of living (rural or urban areas), gender, age groups,
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22 nighttime sleep duration, self-perceived health status, and certain chronic conditions, especially
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24 chronic kidney disease and diabetes. In addition, intervention strategies that address short
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26 nighttime sleep duration may be needed to alleviate depressive symptoms and improve mental
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28 health in this population. Intervention programs should also be prioritized to target at specific
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30 populations, such as women and residents living in rural areas, as these populations were at a
31
32 higher risk of developing depressive symptoms. Finally, new patients with chronic kidney
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34 disease and diabetes may be needed to screen for depression at initial visit. Potential participants
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36 with serious depressive symptoms should be referred immediately to a mental health professional.
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38 Individuals with these two conditions are particularly vulnerable to the deleterious effects of
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40 affective symptoms, since depression is a known risk factor for noncompliance with medical
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42 treatment and adverse health outcomes ^{43 44}.
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49 **Conclusions**

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3 To conclude, our study found a high incidence of depressive symptoms in 4 years of
4 follow-up among a nationally representative mid-aged and older Chinese population. In addition,
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6 great disparities in the incidence of depressive symptoms were observed between individuals
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8 lived in rural and urban areas and between men and women. Furthermore, we identified that
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10 worse self-perceived health, shorter duration of sleeping, diabetes and chronic kidney disease at
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12 baseline increased the risk for depressive symptoms. These findings supported the importance of
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14 baseline status to longitudinal changes in depressive symptoms. Thus, interventions for
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16 vulnerable mid-aged and older adults should focus on addressing short nighttime sleep duration.
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18 These findings also revealed the burden of depressive symptoms in China, helped to prioritize
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20 health care resources and identified individuals at higher risk for depressive symptoms, such as
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22 those with chronic kidney disease and diabetes, or women and residents living in rural areas, so
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24 that early interventions can be implemented to prevent depressive symptoms.
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30 **Figure Legend**

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33 Figure 1. The Incidence of Depressive Symptoms in 4 Years of Follow-up among
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35 Participants of the CHARLS
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Contributorship Statement

All authors contribute to the conception and design of this study. YW, YY, and DW were responsible for the design, analysis, drafting and revision of this manuscript. CL and JL were responsible for interpretation of data and preparation of the manuscript.

Competing Interests Statement

None declared.

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Patient Consent for Publication

Not required.

Data Sharing Statement

The study used a public data from the CHARLS that were obtained from the CHARLS home page at <http://charls.pku.edu.cn/en>.

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Tables

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of the CHARLS participants free of depressive symptoms

Variable	Distribution
N	10,288
age, years, mean (SD)	58.5 (9.8)
Male, n (%)	5845 (50.7%)
Living in rural areas, n (%)	8,440 (73.3%)
Education, n (%)	
<i>No formal education or illiterate</i>	2,736 (23.7%)
<i>Some primary school</i>	1,804 (15.7%)
<i>Finished primary school</i>	2,590 (22.5%)
<i>Junior high school or above</i>	4,394 (38.1%)
Currently married, n (%)	10,375 (90.0%)
Smoking status, n (%)	
<i>Current smoker</i>	3,629 (31.5%)
<i>Former smoker</i>	1,034 (9.0%)
<i>Never smoking</i>	6,868 (60.0%)
Drinking status, n (%)	
<i>Regular drinkers</i>	1,951 (17.9%)
<i>Occasional drinkers</i>	476 (4.4%)
<i>Former drinkers</i>	646 (5.9%)
<i>Never drinking</i>	7,833 (71.8%)
Weight, kg, mean (SD)	60 (11.8)
Height, m, mean (SD)	1.6 (0.1)
Body mass index, kg/m ² , mean (SD)	23.7 (4)
Sleeping duration, hours, mean (SD)	6.7 (1.7)
CES-D short form score	5.1 (3.3)
Self-perceived health status, n (%)	
<i>Excellent</i>	483 (4.2%)
<i>Very good</i>	1,744 (15.1%)
<i>Good</i>	4,136 (35.9%)
<i>Fair</i>	3,977 (34.5%)
<i>Poor</i>	1,187 (10.3%)
Chronic conditions, n (%)	
<i>Hypertension</i>	4,045 (40.3%)
<i>Dyslipidemia</i>	1,016 (9.0%)
<i>Diabetes</i>	1,210 (15.0%)
<i>Cancer</i>	97 (0.8%)
<i>Liver disease</i>	387 (3.4%)
<i>Heart disease</i>	1,162 (10.1%)
<i>Stroke</i>	188 (1.6%)
<i>Kidney disease</i>	563 (4.9%)

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3	<i>Gastrointestinal disease</i>	2,180 (18.9%)
4	<i>Dementia</i>	105 (0.9%)
5	<i>Arthritis</i>	3,221 (28.0%)
6	<i>Asthma</i>	312 (2.7%)
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8 *Note.* CES-D=Center for Epidemiologic Study of Depression short form; SD=standard deviation.
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For peer review only

Table 2. Incidence of depressive symptoms among the CHARLS participants

	Ever having depressive Symptoms	Depressive symptoms in both visits 2 & 3	Depressive symptoms in 2 years	Depressive symptoms in 4 years
Overall	22.3 (21.3-23.3)	4.4 (4.0-4.9)	13.2 (12.5-14.1)	16.8 (15.9-17.7)
Rural	25.7 (24.6-26.8)	5.3 (4.8-5.8)	15.3 (14.3-16.2)	18.8 (17.8-19.8)
Urban	15.3 (13.4-17.2)	2.6 (1.9-3.3)	9.0 (7.4-10.6)	12.2 (10.4-14.1)
Men	16.7 (15.5-17.9)	3.0 (2.5-3.5)	9.9 (9.0-10.9)	12.2 (11.1-13.2)
Women	27.9 (26.4-29.4)	5.8 (5.1-6.6)	16.6 (15.3-17.9)	21.5 (20.1-22.9)

For peer review only

Table 3. Factors associated with the incidence of depressive symptoms in 4 years of follow-up

Variables	Odds ratio (95% confidence interval)	<i>P</i>
Age, per year older	0.98 (0.97-0.99)	0.002
Male vs. Female	0.60 (0.49-0.72)	<.0001
Education level		
<i>No formal education or illiterate</i>	ref.	0.0004
<i>Some primary school (read and write)</i>	1.06 (0.88-1.28)	
<i>Finished primary school</i>	0.88 (0.73-1.05)	
<i>Junior high school or above</i>	0.72 (0.60-0.87)	
Rural vs. Urban	1.66 (1.38-1.98)	<.0001
Not married vs. Married	1.26 (1.01-1.57)	0.04
Smoking status		
<i>Current smokers</i>	ref.	
<i>Former smokers</i>	0.69 (0.53-0.91)	0.03
<i>Nonsmokers</i>	0.96 (0.80-1.17)	
Drinking status		
<i>Never drinkers</i>		
<i>Former drinkers</i>	1.03 (0.78-1.36)	0.21
<i>Occasional drinkers</i>	0.83 (0.59-1.15)	
<i>Regular drinkers</i>	0.83 (0.68-1.01)	
Body mass index, per 1 kg/m ² increase	0.99 (0.97-1.01)	0.16
Self-perceived health status		
<i>Excellent</i>	0.38 (0.26-0.57)	<.0001
<i>Very good</i>	0.36 (0.28-0.46)	
<i>Good</i>	0.53 (0.43-0.64)	
<i>Fair</i>	0.58 (0.48-0.71)	
<i>Poor</i>	ref.	
Sleep duration, per hour longer	0.90 (0.87-0.93)	<.0001
Hypertension (Y vs. N)	1.06 (0.92-1.21)	0.44
Dyslipidemia (Y vs. N)	0.92 (0.73-1.16)	0.50
Diabetes (Y vs. N)	1.19 (1.00-1.42)	0.04
Cancer (Y vs. N)	0.97 (0.47-2.01)	0.94
Chronic Lung Disease (Y vs. N)	1.16 (0.92-1.46)	0.22
Chronic Liver Disease (Y vs. N)	0.86 (0.61-1.21)	0.39
Heart Disease (Y vs. N)	1.05 (0.85-1.30)	0.63
Stroke (Y vs. N)	1.00 (0.61-1.64)	0.99
Chronic Kidney Disease (Y vs. N)	1.37 (1.05-1.79)	0.02
Chronic Digestive Disorders (Y vs. N)	1.09 (0.93-1.27)	0.28
Psychological Disorders (Y vs. N)	0.89 (0.43-1.85)	0.76
Dementia (Y vs. N)	1.19 (0.58-2.45)	0.64
Asthma (Y vs. N)	1.21 (0.83-1.77)	0.33

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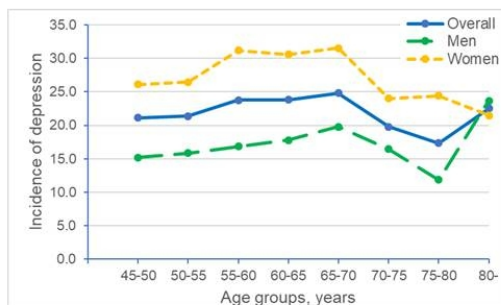


Figure 1. The Incidence of Depressive Symptoms in 4 Years of Follow-up among Participants of the CHARLS

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STROBE 2007 (v4) Statement—Checklist of items that should be included in reports of *cohort studies*

Section/Topic	Item #	Recommendation	Reported on page #
Title and abstract	1	(a) Indicate the study's design with a commonly used term in the title or the abstract	3
		(b) Provide in the abstract an informative and balanced summary of what was done and what was found	3
Introduction			
Background/rationale	2	Explain the scientific background and rationale for the investigation being reported	6-7
Objectives	3	State specific objectives, including any prespecified hypotheses	7
Methods			
Study design	4	Present key elements of study design early in the paper	8
Setting	5	Describe the setting, locations, and relevant dates, including periods of recruitment, exposure, follow-up, and data collection	8-9
Participants	6	(a) Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of selection of participants. Describe methods of follow-up	8
		(b) For matched studies, give matching criteria and number of exposed and unexposed	NA
Variables	7	Clearly define all outcomes, exposures, predictors, potential confounders, and effect modifiers. Give diagnostic criteria, if applicable	9-11
Data sources/ measurement	8*	For each variable of interest, give sources of data and details of methods of assessment (measurement). Describe comparability of assessment methods if there is more than one group	9
Bias	9	Describe any efforts to address potential sources of bias	17
Study size	10	Explain how the study size was arrived at	8
Quantitative variables	11	Explain how quantitative variables were handled in the analyses. If applicable, describe which groupings were chosen and why	12
Statistical methods	12	(a) Describe all statistical methods, including those used to control for confounding	12
		(b) Describe any methods used to examine subgroups and interactions	NA
		(c) Explain how missing data were addressed	NA
		(d) If applicable, explain how loss to follow-up was addressed	NA
		(e) Describe any sensitivity analyses	NA
Results			

Participants	13*	(a) Report numbers of individuals at each stage of study—eg numbers potentially eligible, examined for eligibility, confirmed eligible, included in the study, completing follow-up, and analysed	8
		(b) Give reasons for non-participation at each stage	NA
		(c) Consider use of a flow diagram	NA
Descriptive data	14*	(a) Give characteristics of study participants (eg demographic, clinical, social) and information on exposures and potential confounders	13
		(b) Indicate number of participants with missing data for each variable of interest	NA
		(c) Summarise follow-up time (eg, average and total amount)	8
Outcome data	15*	Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures over time	NA
Main results	16	(a) Give unadjusted estimates and, if applicable, confounder-adjusted estimates and their precision (eg, 95% confidence interval). Make clear which confounders were adjusted for and why they were included	11, 13-14
		(b) Report category boundaries when continuous variables were categorized	NA
		(c) If relevant, consider translating estimates of relative risk into absolute risk for a meaningful time period	NA
Other analyses	17	Report other analyses done—eg analyses of subgroups and interactions, and sensitivity analyses	NA
Discussion			
Key results	18	Summarise key results with reference to study objectives	14
Limitations			
Interpretation	20	Give a cautious overall interpretation of results considering objectives, limitations, multiplicity of analyses, results from similar studies, and other relevant evidence	17
Generalisability	21	Discuss the generalisability (external validity) of the study results	17
Other information			
Funding	22	Give the source of funding and the role of the funders for the present study and, if applicable, for the original study on which the present article is based	20

*Give information separately for cases and controls in case-control studies and, if applicable, for exposed and unexposed groups in cohort and cross-sectional studies.

Note: An Explanation and Elaboration article discusses each checklist item and gives methodological background and published examples of transparent reporting. The STROBE checklist is best used in conjunction with this article (freely available on the Web sites of PLoS Medicine at <http://www.plosmedicine.org/>, Annals of Internal Medicine at <http://www.annals.org/>, and Epidemiology at <http://www.epidem.com/>). Information on the STROBE Initiative is available at www.strobe-statement.org.

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Incidence and risk factors of depressive symptoms in four years of follow-up among mid-aged and elderly community-dwelling Chinese adults: Findings from the China health and Retirement Longitudinal Study

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3 **Incidence and risk factors of depressive symptoms in four years of follow-up among mid-**
4 **aged and elderly community-dwelling Chinese adults: Findings from the China Health and**
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7 **Retirement Longitudinal Study**
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10 Yue Wen, Chunjuan Liu, Jing Liao, Yiqiong Yin*, Dongmei Wu*

11
12 Correspondence should be made to:

13
14 Dongmei Wu, PhD, RN

15
16 Department of Nursing, The Clinical Hospital of Chengdu Brain Science Institute, MOE Key

17
18 Lab for Neuroinformation, University of Electronic Science and Technology of China

19
20 Huli West 1st Lane, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, 610036.

21
22 Tel: 86-28-69515754

23
24 E-mail: wudongmei_2001@163.com

25
26 Yiqiong Yin, BN, RN

27
28 Chief Superintendent Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital,

29
30 Sichuan University

31
32 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, 610041.

33
34 Tel: 86-28-85422877

35
36 E-mail: yiqiong489@163.com

37
38 *: Yiqiong Yin and Dongmei Wu were co-corresponding authors for this manuscript.

39
40 The full names, institutions, city, and country of all other co-authors:

41
42 Yue Wen, BN, RN

43
44 Supervisor Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan

45
46 University

47
48 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: wenyue19820327@163.com

1
2
3 Chunjuan Liu, BN, RN

4
5 Supervisor Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan
6
7 University

8
9
10 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: liuchunjuan2002@163.com

11
12 Jing Liao, MSN, RN

13
14 Senior Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan University

15
16 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: m15982277765@163.com

17
18 Yiqiong Yin, BN, RN

19
20 Chief Superintendent Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital,
21
22 Sichuan University

23
24 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: yiqiong489@163.com

25
26 Dongmei Wu, PhD, RN

27
28 Assistant Professor, Department of Nursing, The Clinical Hospital of Chengdu Brain Science

29
30 Institute, MOE Key Lab for Neuroinformation, University of Electronic Science and Technology
31
32 of China

33
34 Huli West 1st Lane, Chengdu, China, 610036. Tel: 86-28-69515754. E-mail:

35
36
37
38
39
40 wudongmei_2001@163.com

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Abstract

Objectives. The purpose of this study was to examine the incidence of depressive symptoms, and determine if baseline risk factors conferred a risk for incident depressive symptoms over time in a nationally representative sample of mid-aged and elderly Chinese population.

Design. This study was a secondary analysis of a prospective cohort from a nationally representative sample.

Setting. Community samples in 28 provinces of China were recruited from the baseline survey of the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study. A four-stage, stratified, cluster probability sampling strategy was used, which included 10,257 households with members aged 45 years or older and their spouse.

Participants. A total of 11,533 participants free of depressive symptoms at baseline were identified, and 10,288 were re-examined in either the first and/or the second follow-up surveys. The current analyses were conducted among the 10,288 participants.

Primary and secondary outcome measures. Depressive symptoms were measured by the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale short form.

Results. The findings showed that the incidence of depressive symptoms in a 4-year follow-up was as high as 22.3%. The incidence was higher in rural areas and women. Furthermore, longer sleeping duration and better self-perceived health status were both associated with lower risk of depressive symptoms. On contrary, having diabetes and chronic kidney disease at baseline increased the risk of depressive symptoms. However, baseline body mass index was not associated with the onset of depressive symptoms in this population.

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3 **Conclusions.** The findings of this study highlight the importance of developing an appropriate
4 screening test to identify depressive symptoms for those who are vulnerable and ensure these
5 individuals can receive early interventions for depressive symptoms.
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10 **Key words:** depressive symptoms, incidence, mid-aged and older adults, China
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Strengths and limitations of this study

- Since the sample was representative of community-dwelling mid-aged and older Chinese adults, the study results can be generalized to mid-aged and older Chinese adults.
- This is the first study in China to estimate the incidence of depressive symptoms in a nationally representative population in China.
- Depressive symptoms were based on self-reports instead of clinically diagnosis. Therefore, information bias may be present. However, with longitudinal design, information bias in the current study was very likely to be non-differential.
- This study was a prospective analysis of baseline risk factors with depressive symptoms at follow-up, and no causal associations between these predictors and depressive symptoms can be drawn from the analysis.

Introduction

Depression has been recognized as a leading cause of disability and a major contributor to disease burdens globally¹. An estimated 322 million adults had depression in 2015 worldwide, with nearly half of these people living in the South-East Asia and Western Pacific regions². In China, about 4.2% adult population was estimated to be depressed, and the prevalence of depression reached a peak in older adulthood². With fast economic growth, mid-aged adults are exposed to a high-stress lifestyle, which is thought to contribute significantly to an increase in mental health disorders in susceptible people¹. Older adults, on the other hand, face noteworthy challenges to their life, including loss of independence, loss of social support due to the death of a spouse or weakened family connectedness (traditionally referred to as ‘filial piety’), financial difficulties, and medical vulnerability³. Late-life depressive symptoms increase risk for significant impairment in social function³, dementia⁴, declined quality of life⁵, and suicide⁶. They further complicate the prognosis of concurrent medical problems by increasing physical disability and decreasing motivation and adherence to prescribed medications and/or exercise or rehabilitation programs^{7,8}.

Although depression has come to be regarded as the common cold of psychosocial functioning in Western culture, mental disorders are still viewed as degrading not only to the patient, but also to the entire family in Chinese culture^{9,10}. In addition, although effective interventions have been developed to alleviate symptoms of depression, depressive symptoms are often overlooked among the elderly, since most of them mistakenly consider these symptoms to be part of the normal ageing process¹¹. Therefore, older adults may not actively seek medical treatment and leave their depressive symptoms undiagnosed or untreated. As persons aged 45 or older will increase from 32% to 51% of the total population from 2010 to 2040 in China¹²,

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3 reliable and up-to-date estimates of the proportion of this population affected by depressive
4 symptoms are a key ingredient of effective health policy, planning, and evaluation.
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8 Recently, a number of population-based studies have estimated prevalence of depressive
9 symptoms among mid-aged and older Chinese adults ^{3 11 13 14}. Given that all these studies were
10 cross-sectional, the incidence of depressive symptoms among mid-aged and older Chinese adults
11 was not clear. Furthermore, despite a myriad of studies that examined a number of health
12 conditions associated with an increased risk of mid- and late-life depressive symptoms, including
13 chronic diseases, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status ^{3 14-17}, the
14 prospective relationships between these health conditions and depressive symptoms have not
15 been well understood in this population. Such prospective relationships may provide further
16 evidence on how baseline conditions may be predictive of depressive symptoms in the follow-up
17 than cross-sectional analysis, especially given that these health conditions are expected to be a
18 great challenge to an increasing aging population, and can often co-occur with depressive
19 symptoms which may make these conditions worse ³. A better understanding of these
20 associations may also provide information that is useful in identifying patients who are
21 vulnerable to mid-life or late-life depressive symptoms, and proactively assessing and treating
22 modifiable risk factors during primary health care service.
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42 Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the incidence of depressive
43 symptoms among mid-aged and older adults in China, and determine if baseline sleep duration,
44 body weight, self-perceived health status, and chronic conditions conferred a risk for incident
45 depressive symptoms over time, using baseline and four years of follow-up data from the China
46 Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS).
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53 **Methods**

Study Design

This study was a secondary analysis of prospective data from the CHARLS. The CHARLS is a nationwide, community-engaged, population-based epidemiological study of Chinese adults aged 45 years or older. The purpose of the CHARLS was to obtain detailed information regarding the dynamics of retirement and how it interacts with health, health insurance, and economic well-being. The CHARLS collects detailed information on a wide range of domains, including demographics, health status, physical measures, employment history, pension insurance, retirement, income, expenditures and assets¹⁸. The current study used data from baseline, the first, and the second follow-up surveys.

Participants

The CHARLS national baseline survey was conducted in 28 provinces (Tibet, Ningxia, and Hainan were not included) across the country from May 2011 to March 2012. It was a survey of 10,257 households with members aged 45 years or older and their spouse, for a total of about 17,708 individuals. A four-stage, stratified, cluster probability sampling strategy was used to select eligible participants¹⁸. Details of the sampling procedure are published elsewhere¹⁹. The response rate for the survey was over 80% (94% in rural areas and 69% in urban areas)¹⁸. The baseline cohort of the CHARLS participants was followed up every two years with the same survey questionnaires and biomedical measures¹⁸. The first follow-up survey of the CHARLS was fielded between July 2013 and January 2014. Subjects in this study used the same inclusion and exclusion criteria as the original study. A total of 11,533 participants free of depressive symptoms at baseline were identified, of whom 9,329 participated in the first follow-up survey in 2013-2014, 9,157 were examined in the second follow-up survey in 2015-2016, and 10,288 were

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3 followed in either the first or the second follow-up surveys. The current analyses were conducted
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5 among the 10,288 participants.
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7 **Patient and Public Involvement**

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10 In the current study, we used de-identified data from the CHARLS with no direct
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12 involvement of or interaction with participants in the design, recruitment or conduct of the
13
14 original cohort study.
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16 **Variables, Definitions, and Measures**

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19 **Depressive symptoms.** The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-
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21 D) short form was used to measure depressive symptoms²⁰. The CES-D short form consists of
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23 ten items, and each item was rated on a four-point Likert scale with answers ranging from 0
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25 (rarely or none of the time) to 3 (most or all of the time) with the total possible summary score of
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27 0 to 30. The time frame for the CES-D short form refers to the week prior to interview. Item 5
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29 (“feeling hopeful about the future”) and 8 (“feeling happy”) were reversely scored before
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31 analysis. Higher scores corresponds to higher levels of depressive symptoms, and a score of 12
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33 or higher has been used as the cut-off point for depressive symptoms²¹.
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38 The CES-D short form has been validated among a subsample of 742 CHARLS
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40 participants aged 60 years and older, showing adequate psychometric properties²¹.
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42 Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the two-factor model had the best fit. Depressive affect
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44 and somatic retardation were loaded as the first factor, and positive affect was loaded as the
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46 second factor. The two-factor structure varied across both genders in multi-group analysis ($\chi^2=$
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48 144.13, $p<0.001$). R^2 coefficient was used to measure the reliability of each item, and some of
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50 them differed between both gender groups. For example, depressive affect and somatic
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3 retardation accounted for 37% and 64% of the variance in the depression indicator (“bothered”)
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5 for the males and females, respectively ²¹.
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8 **Measure of health conditions associated with depressive symptoms.** These factors
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10 included chronic conditions, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status.
11 Information on chronic conditions was primarily based on self-reports except hypertension and
12 diabetes. Participants were asked if they had been diagnosed with any of the following health
13 conditions: arthritis, dyslipidemia, cancer (excluding minor skin cancers), liver diseases (except
14 for fatty liver, tumors or cancer), cardiovascular diseases (heart attack, coronary heart disease,
15 angina, congestive heart failure, or other heart problems), stroke, kidney disease (except for
16 cancer or tumor), stomach or other gastrointestinal diseases (except for tumor or cancer),
17 memory-related diseases, and asthma. Participants answered “yes” to these questions were
18 defined as having these doctor-diagnosed conditions.
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31 Hypertension was defined based on the most current guidelines from the American Heart
32 Association, which have lowered the threshold of hypertension cut-off points to 130/80 mmHg ²².
33 A systolic blood pressure measurement of 130 mmHg and higher, or a diastolic measurement of
34 80 mmHg and higher, or 130/80 mmHg and higher, or taking antihypertensive medications
35 including modern western medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, or using other treatment for
36 hypertension was considered as having hypertension ²². Blood pressure was measured three
37 times (approximately 45 seconds apart) for each participant on the left arm in sitting position,
38 using an electronic blood pressure monitor (Omron™ HEM-7112)²³.
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49 The diagnosis of diabetes was based on the current guidelines from the American
50 Diabetes Association (2018). Readings of 126 mg/dL or higher for fasting blood glucose \geq 126
51 mg/dL, or readings of 200 mg/dL or higher for random blood glucose, or readings of 6.5% or
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3 higher for glycated hemoglobin, or use of insulin, or taking oral hypoglycemic medications
4 including traditional Chinese medicine, modern western medicine, or other diabetes treatment
5 was considered as having diabetes ²⁴.
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10 Weight was measured to the nearest 0.1 kg using a digital scale (OmronTM HN-286,
11 Yangzhou, China) on an even, uncarpeted surface, with participants removing heavy outer
12 clothing. Height was measured without shoes to the nearest 0.1 cm using a stadiometer
13 (SecaTM213, Hangzhou, China). Body mass index (BMI, weight in kilograms divided by height
14 in meters squared) was calculated from the participants' weight and height.
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19 Self-perceived health status is a powerful indicator of the health status of elderly people
20 ²⁵. It was measured based on self-reports to the following question, “Would you rate health
21 as...”, with five response options provided: excellent, very good, good, fair, and poor.
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26 Sleep duration in hours was collected using a question, “During the past month, how
27 many hours of actual sleep did you get at night (average hours for one night)? (This may be
28 shorter than the number of hours you spend in bed.)”
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33 **Covariates.** Factors that could confound the main association were identified a priori
34 from current literature. Covariates included age, gender ³, education ²⁶, and marital status ^{3 27}.
35 Consistent with a prior CHARLS publication ²⁸, education was categorized as illiterate or no
36 formal education, some primary school but can read and write, primary school including home
37 schooling, and middle school or above. Marital status was grouped as married versus not married.
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40 41 42 **Ethical Considerations**

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45 The CHARLS was approved by the Ethical Review Committee. The current study is a
46 secondary analysis of the de-identified CHARLS public data. The Ethics Review Committee
47 granted the current study exemption from review.
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Statistical Analysis

Incidence of depressive symptoms. The incidence of depressive symptoms was analyzed taking into account the complex survey design and nonresponse rate in both estimates and the corresponding standard errors (SEs). Participants were categorized into 5-year age groups. SAS PROC SURVEYFREQ procedure was used to obtain the overall and gender specific incidence of depressive symptoms among all participants and by the 5-year age groups. In addition, overall and gender-specific incidence of depressive symptoms was estimated by rural and urban areas. We estimated the incidence of four outcomes of depressive symptoms: having depressive symptoms in the first follow-up survey (2013-2014); having depressive symptoms in the second follow-up survey (2015-2016); ever having depressive symptoms in the first or the second follow-up survey; and consistently having depressive symptoms in both follow-up surveys.

Prospective analysis. Baseline characteristics of the participants were summarized as frequency and percentage for categorical variables and mean and standard deviation or median and interquartile range for continuous variables. Associations of baseline health behaviors, including chronic conditions, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status, with the incidence of ever having depressive symptoms in 4 years of follow-up were evaluated by a multivariate logistic regression model, while controlling for all covariates as mentioned above. Odds ratios (ORs) and the corresponding 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were reported. The SAS 9.4 (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, North Carolina) was used to perform the analyses. All the p values were two-sided, and $p < 0.05$ was considered significant.

Results

Sample Characteristics

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3 A total of 10,288 participants aged 45 years or older were included in the estimate of
4 depressive symptoms incidence. As shown in Table 1, the average age of all participants was
5 58.5 years and roughly half participants (49.3%) were women. Most of the participants (73.3%)
6 lived in rural areas and 60.6% participants had education of primary school or above. The
7 majority of participants (90.0%) were married or living with a partner at the time of data
8 collection. About a third of the participants (31.5%) were current smokers and 17.9% were
9 current regular drinkers. Participants had an average BMI of 23.7 kg/m². The mean duration of
10 sleep per night was 6.7 hours, and less than 20% of participants perceived their health as very
11 good or excellent. The mean CES-D short form score was 5.1 at baseline.

22 **Incidence of Depressive Symptoms**

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26 As shown in Table 2 and in Figure 1, the incidence of ever having depressive symptoms
27 in 4 years was 22.3% (95% CI: 21.3%-23.3%). The incidence was much higher in rural areas
28 than that in urban areas (25.7% vs. 15.3%, $p < 0.0001$). Women had higher incidence of
29 depressive symptoms than men (27.9% vs. 16.7%, $p < 0.0001$). There is no clear pattern of the
30 incidence of depressive symptoms over age groups (Figure 1). The incidence was highest among
31 the 65-70 years of age group and lowest among the 45-50 years of age group.

32 **Baseline Risk Factors and Incident Depressive Symptoms**

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36 As shown in Table 3, in the fully adjusted multivariable logistic regression model,
37 sleeping duration and self-perceived health status were both inversely associated with the risk of
38 depressive symptoms. Specifically, participants with an hour longer of sleeping had a 10% (95%
39 CI: 7%-13%, $p < 0.0001$) lower risk of developing depressive symptoms in 4 years of follow up.
40 Compared to individuals who perceived their health status as poor, those who perceived their
41 health status as fair, good, very good, and excellent had 42% (95% CI: 39%-52%), 47% (95% CI:
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3 36%-57%), 64% (95% CI: 54%-72%), and 62% (95% CI: 43%-74%) lower risk of developing
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5 depressive symptoms, respectively. In addition, three chronic conditions, diabetes (OR=1.19, 95%
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7 CI: 1.00-1.42, p=0.04), chronic kidney disease (OR=1.37, 95% CI: 1.05-1.79, p=0.02), chronic
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9 digestive disorders (OR=1.15, 95% CI: 1.01-1.31, p=0.04), and arthritis (OR=1.43, 95% CI:
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11 1.28-1.61, p<0.0001) were associated with higher risk of depressive symptoms. However,
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13 baseline BMI was not associated with the onset of depressive symptoms in this population
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15 (OR=0.99, 95% CI: 0.97-1.01). Chronic lung disease (p=0.001), chronic liver disease (p=0.004),
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17 and asthma (p=0.02) were positively associated with incidence of depressive disorder in the raw
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19 analysis, but became non-significant in the fully adjusted model (all p>0.05).
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24 **Discussion**

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26 Through analysis to data of a nationally representative sample of mid-aged and older
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28 Chinese adults, we found that the incidence of depressive symptoms in a 4-year follow-up was as
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30 high as 22.3%. Large disparities in the incidence of depressive symptoms were observed
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32 between rural and urban areas and between men and women. Furthermore, longer sleeping
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34 duration and better self-perceived health status were both associated with lower risk of
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36 depressive symptoms. On contrary, having diabetes and chronic kidney disease at baseline
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38 increased the risk of depressive symptoms. However, baseline BMI was not associated with
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40 depressive symptoms in this population.
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45 This is the first study that examined the incidence of depressive symptoms in a nationally
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47 representative population in China. Our study found that in 4 years of follow-up, as high as 22.3%
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49 of the mid-aged and older Chinese adults developed depressive symptoms. Using the same
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51 database, a recent study reported that the prevalence of depressive symptoms at CHARLS
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53 baseline survey was up to 26.2%¹³. Collectively, these findings revealed that depressive
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3 symptoms were a major public health challenge in China, and intervention programs should be
4 developed to reduce the burden of depressive symptoms. Furthermore, large disparities were also
5 observed between rural and urban residents and between men and women. In particular, women
6 and residents living in rural areas were at a higher risk of developing depressive symptoms.
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12 Individuals with longer sleep duration had lower risk of depressive symptoms. This
13 finding is in line with previous studies ^{29 30}. Sleep disorders are often the presenting and core
14 symptoms of depression ³¹. However, treatment of depression did not resolve sleep symptoms,
15 which may confer a greater risk for depression recurrence and relapse ³¹. Therefore, sleep
16 deprivation should be at least considered as an early indicator of depressive symptoms.
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19 Individuals with sleep deprivation should be aware of their high risk of depressive symptoms and
20 manage to improve the length of their sleeping.
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29 Better self-perceived health status also reduced the risk of depressive symptoms in the
30 current study. The finding is consistent with studies among other populations ^{32 33}. Self-perceived
31 health is a powerful indicator of the overall health status of elderly people ²⁵. Many factors,
32 including sociodemographic characteristics, chronic disease, functional status, social
33 relationships, neighborhood environment, and nutrition pattern, were all important determinants
34 of self-perceived health ²⁵. These factors are also associated with depressive symptoms. The
35 current study adjusted most of the factors, except for functional status, social relationship, and
36 nutrition pattern, which were not available in the CHARLS database. Still, poorer self-perceived
37 health status was significantly associated with higher risk of depressive symptoms. Future
38 studies additionally controlling for those factors will help to evaluate the contribution of those
39 factors on the associations of self-perceived health status with depressive symptoms.
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54 Furthermore, such study may also help delineate whether self-perceived health status may
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3 represent other factors that may lead to depressive symptoms. Finally, individuals with
4 depressive disorders were more likely to report poor self-perceived health^{34 35}. Therefore, there
5 might be a bidirectional association between depressive symptoms and self-perceived health.
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10 Future studies examining the bi-directional relationship are warranted.

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12 Among 12 chronic conditions, baseline chronic kidney disease increased the risk of
13 depressive symptoms at follow-up. Although the underlying mechanisms have not been well
14 understood, some authors suggested that the psychosocial and biologic changes in dialysis may
15 explain this relationship³⁶. In addition to chronic kidney disease, baseline diabetes also
16 conferred a higher risk of symptoms of depression over time in this study. Similar results were
17 reported in a meta-analysis of 11 studies, which found that people with diabetes at baseline had a
18 24% higher risk of developing depression at follow-up compared to those without diabetes³⁷. In
19 addition, high prevalence of depression among people with diabetes and/or chronic kidney
20 disease has also been observed in cross-sectional studies³⁸⁻⁴⁰. In concordance with these findings,
21 this study added further evidence that compared to other chronic conditions at baseline, baseline
22 chronic disease and diabetes were more likely to be associated with depressive symptoms over
23 time in a population of mid-aged and older Chinese population.

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40 Overweight/obesity is well established to interfere with mental health, with depressive
41 symptoms being more common among overweight/obese individuals than their normal-weight
42 counterparts, especially in overweight/obese women^{41 42}. A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies
43 further confirmed this relationship, in which excess weight at baseline increased a higher risk for
44 incident depression at follow-up⁴³. In contrast to these findings from Western and European
45 countries, using data from a prospective survey of a large, representative sample of mid-aged and
46 elderly community-dwelling residents in Mainland China, we did not find a relationship between
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3 baseline BMI and subsequent depressive symptoms over time. These inconsistent findings may
4 suggest that because participants in the current study were predominantly low in BMI at baseline
5 (mean BMI was 23.7 kg/m²), their likelihood of experiencing depressive symptoms may have
6 been lower compared to those participants reported in Luppino et al ⁴³. However, these are
7 preliminary findings that need to be further investigated in future prospective studies in this
8 population.
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11 The study has several important strengths. First, to the best of our knowledge, this is the
12 first study to estimate incidence of depressive symptoms in a nationally representative sample of
13 middle-aged and older Chinese adults. Previous studies have focused on the estimation of
14 depressive symptoms prevalence ^{44 45} or investigated the incidence of depressive symptoms in a
15 regional sample ⁴⁶. Second, since the sample was representative of community-dwelling mid-
16 aged and older Chinese adults, the results can be generalized to mid-aged and older Chinese
17 adults. Third, a Chinese specific cut-off point of the CES-D short form score for depressive
18 symptoms has been used, and the cut-off point was validated among middle-aged and older
19 Chinese adults ²¹. Therefore, our study provided more reliable estimate of the incidence of
20 depressive symptoms. Finally, strict quality control measures, including GPS matching, data
21 checking, recording and checking interviews, and calling back participants, were implemented at
22 each stage of the study to ensure data quality and reliability.
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44 There were also some limitations in this study that should be acknowledged. First,
45 depressive symptoms were based on self-reports instead of clinically diagnosis. Therefore,
46 information bias may be present. However, with longitudinal design, information bias in the
47 current study was very likely to be non-differential. Since non-differential misclassification
48 generally bias the association estimates towards the null, our study findings were more robust.
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3 Second, nighttime sleep duration was also measured based on self-reports. The use of self-
4 reported measures in the CHARLS surveys may have biased study results, since participants may
5 consistently under- or overestimate their nighttime sleep duration ⁴⁷. Objective or direct
6 measures of sleep duration should be used to increase precision and accuracy of self-report
7 assessment. Finally, this study was a prospective analysis of baseline risk factors with depressive
8 symptoms at follow-up, and no causal associations between these predictors and depressive
9 symptoms can be drawn from the analysis.
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19 The findings of the current study have important implications for clinical practice. Health
20 care professionals are especially encouraged to address the needs for better mental health in
21 elderly population ⁴⁸. In view of the high incidence of depressive symptoms (22.3%) among mid-
22 aged and elderly Chinese, the findings of this study highlight the importance of developing an
23 appropriate screening test to identify depressive symptoms for those who are vulnerable and
24 ensure these individuals can receive early interventions for depressive symptoms. The screening
25 test should include items such as areas of living (rural or urban areas), gender, age groups,
26 nighttime sleep duration, self-perceived health status, and certain chronic conditions, especially
27 chronic kidney disease and diabetes. In addition, intervention strategies that address short
28 nighttime sleep duration may be used to alleviate depressive symptoms and improve mental
29 health in this population. Intervention programs should also be prioritized to target at specific
30 populations, such as women and residents living in rural areas, as these populations were at a
31 higher risk of developing depressive symptoms. Finally, new patients with chronic kidney
32 disease and diabetes may be needed to screen for depression at initial visit. Potential participants
33 with serious depressive symptoms should be referred immediately to a mental health professional.
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Individuals with these two conditions are particularly vulnerable to the deleterious effects of

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3 affective symptoms, since symptoms of depression is a known risk factor for noncompliance
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5 with medical treatment and adverse health outcomes^{49 50}.
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8 **Conclusions**

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10 To conclude, our study found a high incidence of depressive symptoms in 4 years of
11 follow-up among a nationally representative mid-aged and older Chinese population. In addition,
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13 great disparities in the incidence of depressive symptoms were observed between individuals
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15 lived in rural and urban areas and between men and women. Furthermore, we identified that
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17 worse self-perceived health, shorter duration of sleeping, diabetes and chronic kidney disease at
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19 baseline increased the risk for depressive symptoms. These findings supported the importance of
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21 baseline status to longitudinal changes in depressive symptoms. Thus, interventions for
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23 vulnerable mid-aged and older adults should focus on addressing short nighttime sleep duration.
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25 These findings also help identify individuals at higher risk for depressive symptoms, such as
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27 those with chronic kidney disease and diabetes, or women and residents living in rural areas, so
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29 that early interventions can be implemented to prevent depressive symptoms.
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35 **Figure Legend**

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37 Figure 1. The Incidence of Depressive Symptoms in 4 Years of Follow-up among
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39 Participants of the CHARLS
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Contributorship Statement

All authors contribute to the conception and design of this study. YW, YY, and DW were responsible for the design, analysis, drafting and revision of this manuscript. CL and JL were responsible for interpretation of data and preparation of the manuscript.

Competing Interests Statement

None declared.

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Patient Consent for Publication

Not required.

Data Sharing Statement

The study used a public data from the CHARLS that were obtained from the CHARLS home page at <http://charls.pku.edu.cn/en>.

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Tables

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of the CHARLS participants free of depressive symptoms

Variable	Distribution
N	10,288
age, years, mean (SD)	58.5 (9.8)
Male, n (%)	5845 (50.7%)
Living in rural areas, n (%)	8,440 (73.3%)
Education, n (%)	
<i>No formal education or illiterate</i>	2,736 (23.7%)
<i>Some primary school</i>	1,804 (15.7%)
<i>Finished primary school</i>	2,590 (22.5%)
<i>Junior high school or above</i>	4,394 (38.1%)
Currently married, n (%)	10,375 (90.0%)
Smoking status, n (%)	
<i>Current smoker</i>	3,629 (31.5%)
<i>Former smoker</i>	1,034 (9.0%)
<i>Never smoking</i>	6,868 (60.0%)
Drinking status, n (%)	
<i>Regular drinkers</i>	1,951 (17.9%)
<i>Occasional drinkers</i>	476 (4.4%)
<i>Former drinkers</i>	646 (5.9%)
<i>Never drinking</i>	7,833 (71.8%)
Weight, kg, mean (SD)	60 (11.8)
Height, m, mean (SD)	1.6 (0.1)
Body mass index, kg/m ² , mean (SD)	23.7 (4)
Sleeping duration, hours, mean (SD)	6.7 (1.7)
CES-D short form score	5.1 (3.3)
Self-perceived health status, n (%)	
<i>Excellent</i>	483 (4.2%)
<i>Very good</i>	1,744 (15.1%)
<i>Good</i>	4,136 (35.9%)
<i>Fair</i>	3,977 (34.5%)
<i>Poor</i>	1,187 (10.3%)
Chronic conditions, n (%)	
<i>Hypertension</i>	4,045 (40.3%)
<i>Dyslipidemia</i>	1,016 (9.0%)
<i>Diabetes</i>	1,210 (15.0%)
<i>Cancer</i>	97 (0.8%)
<i>Liver disease</i>	387 (3.4%)
<i>Heart disease</i>	1,162 (10.1%)
<i>Stroke</i>	188 (1.6%)
<i>Kidney disease</i>	563 (4.9%)

<i>Gastrointestinal disease</i>	2,180 (18.9%)
<i>Dementia</i>	105 (0.9%)
<i>Arthritis</i>	3,221 (28.0%)
<i>Asthma</i>	312 (2.7%)

Note. CES-D=Center for Epidemiologic Study of Depression short form; SD=standard deviation.

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Table 2. Incidence of depressive symptoms among the CHARLS participants

	Ever having depressive Symptoms	Depressive symptoms in both visits 2 & 3	Depressive symptoms in 2 years	Depressive symptoms in 4 years
Overall	22.3 (21.3-23.3)	4.4 (4.0-4.9)	13.2 (12.5-14.1)	16.8 (15.9-17.7)
Rural	25.7 (24.6-26.8)	5.3 (4.8-5.8)	15.3 (14.3-16.2)	18.8 (17.8-19.8)
Urban	15.3 (13.4-17.2)	2.6 (1.9-3.3)	9.0 (7.4-10.6)	12.2 (10.4-14.1)
Men	16.7 (15.5-17.9)	3.0 (2.5-3.5)	9.9 (9.0-10.9)	12.2 (11.1-13.2)
Women	27.9 (26.4-29.4)	5.8 (5.1-6.6)	16.6 (15.3-17.9)	21.5 (20.1-22.9)

For peer review only

Table 3. Raw and multi-variables adjusted associations with the incidence of depressive symptoms in 4 years of follow-up.

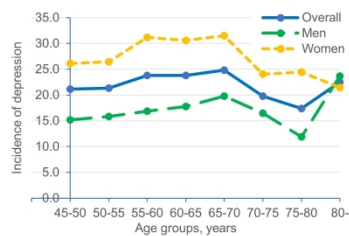
Variables	Multi-Variate Adjusted		Raw Association	
	OR (95% CI)	P	OR (95% CI)	P
Age, per year older	0.99 (0.98-0.99)	0.001	0.99 (0.99-1.00)	0.59
Male vs. Female	0.60 (0.51-0.71)	<.0001	0.51 (0.46-0.56)	<.0001
Education level				
<i>No formal education or illiterate</i>	ref.	<.0001	ref.	<.0001
<i>Some primary school</i>	1.06 (0.90-1.25)		0.93 (0.80-1.08)	
<i>Finished primary school</i>	0.83 (0.71-0.97)		0.67 (0.57-0.77)	
<i>Junior high school or above</i>	0.71 (0.61-0.84)		0.48 (0.42-0.55)	
Rural vs. Urban	1.61 (1.38-1.88)	<.0001	1.72 (1.50-1.96)	<.0001
Not married vs Married	1.25 (1.04-1.51)	0.02	1.28 (1.08-1.51)	0.004
Smoking status				
<i>Non-smokers</i>	ref.		ref.	
<i>Current smokers</i>	1.02 (0.86-1.20)	0.03	0.51 (0.41-0.62)	<.0001
<i>Former smokers</i>	0.75 (0.59-0.96)		0.68 (0.60-0.76)	
Drinking status				
<i>Never drinkers</i>	Ref.		ref.	
<i>Former drinkers</i>	1.02 (0.80-1.30)	0.15	0.84 (0.67-1.04)	<.0001
<i>Occasional drinkers</i>	0.79 (0.59-1.06)		0.59 (0.45-0.78)	
<i>Regular drinkers</i>	0.85 (0.71-1.01)		0.59 (0.51-0.68)	
Body mass index, per 1 kg/m ² increase	0.99 (0.98-1.01)	0.20	0.99 (0.98-1.00)	0.14
Self-perceived health status				
<i>Excellent</i>	0.36 (0.25-0.52)	<.0001	0.28 (0.20-0.39)	<.0001
<i>Very good</i>	0.36 (0.29-0.45)		0.28 (0.23-0.35)	
<i>Good</i>	0.53 (0.44-0.63)		0.45 (0.38-0.53)	
<i>Fair</i>	0.61 (0.52-0.73)		0.56 (0.48-0.66)	
<i>Poor</i>	ref.		ref.	
Sleep duration, per hour longer	0.89 (0.87-0.92)	<.0001	0.88 (0.85-0.90)	<.0001
Hypertension (Y vs. N)	1.07 (0.95-1.21)	0.25	1.07 (0.96-1.18)	0.22
Dyslipidemia (Y vs. N)	0.85 (0.69-1.04)	0.12	0.91 (0.76-1.09)	0.29
Diabetes (Y vs. N)	1.19 (1.00-1.42)	0.04	1.11 (0.95-2.30)	0.19
Cancer (Y vs. N)	0.92 (0.48-1.77)	0.80	1.17 (0.65-2.12)	0.61
Chronic Lung Disease (Y vs. N)	1.18 (0.97-1.44)	0.10	1.33 (1.12-1.58)	0.001
Chronic Liver Disease (Y vs. N)	0.90 (0.67-1.22)	0.51	1.04 (0.79-1.37)	0.81
Heart Disease (Y vs. N)	1.06 (0.88-1.28)	0.54	1.27 (1.08-1.49)	0.004
Stroke (Y vs. N)	0.88 (0.56-1.39)	0.59	1.12 (0.75-1.66)	0.58
Chronic Kidney Disease (Y vs. N)	1.32 (1.04-1.67)	0.02	1.45 (1.16-1.80)	0.001
Chronic Digestive Disorders (Y vs. N)	1.15 (1.01-1.31)	0.04	1.43 (1.26-1.61)	<.0001
Psychological Disorders (Y vs. N)	1.00 (0.53-1.89)	0.99	1.44 (0.81-2.56)	0.22
Dementia (Y vs. N)	1.31 (0.72-2.38)	0.37	1.15 (0.67-1.97)	0.62
Arthritis (Y vs. N)	1.43 (1.28-1.61)	<.0001	1.72 (1.54-1.91)	<.0001
Asthma (Y vs. N)	1.25 (0.90-1.75)	0.19	1.43 (1.06-1.91)	0.02

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Note. CI=confidence interval; OR=odds ratio

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STROBE 2007 (v4) Statement—Checklist of items that should be included in reports of *cohort studies*

Section/Topic	Item #	Recommendation	Reported on page #
Title and abstract	1	(a) Indicate the study's design with a commonly used term in the title or the abstract	3
		(b) Provide in the abstract an informative and balanced summary of what was done and what was found	3
Introduction			
Background/rationale	2	Explain the scientific background and rationale for the investigation being reported	6-7
Objectives	3	State specific objectives, including any prespecified hypotheses	7
Methods			
Study design	4	Present key elements of study design early in the paper	8
Setting	5	Describe the setting, locations, and relevant dates, including periods of recruitment, exposure, follow-up, and data collection	8-9
Participants	6	(a) Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of selection of participants. Describe methods of follow-up	8
		(b) For matched studies, give matching criteria and number of exposed and unexposed	NA
Variables	7	Clearly define all outcomes, exposures, predictors, potential confounders, and effect modifiers. Give diagnostic criteria, if applicable	9-11
Data sources/ measurement	8*	For each variable of interest, give sources of data and details of methods of assessment (measurement). Describe comparability of assessment methods if there is more than one group	9
Bias	9	Describe any efforts to address potential sources of bias	17
Study size	10	Explain how the study size was arrived at	8
Quantitative variables	11	Explain how quantitative variables were handled in the analyses. If applicable, describe which groupings were chosen and why	12
Statistical methods	12	(a) Describe all statistical methods, including those used to control for confounding	12
		(b) Describe any methods used to examine subgroups and interactions	NA
		(c) Explain how missing data were addressed	NA
		(d) If applicable, explain how loss to follow-up was addressed	NA
		(e) Describe any sensitivity analyses	NA
Results			

Participants	13*	(a) Report numbers of individuals at each stage of study—eg numbers potentially eligible, examined for eligibility, confirmed eligible, included in the study, completing follow-up, and analysed	8
		(b) Give reasons for non-participation at each stage	NA
		(c) Consider use of a flow diagram	NA
Descriptive data	14*	(a) Give characteristics of study participants (eg demographic, clinical, social) and information on exposures and potential confounders	13
		(b) Indicate number of participants with missing data for each variable of interest	NA
		(c) Summarise follow-up time (eg, average and total amount)	8
Outcome data	15*	Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures over time	NA
Main results	16	(a) Give unadjusted estimates and, if applicable, confounder-adjusted estimates and their precision (eg, 95% confidence interval). Make clear which confounders were adjusted for and why they were included	11, 13-14
		(b) Report category boundaries when continuous variables were categorized	NA
		(c) If relevant, consider translating estimates of relative risk into absolute risk for a meaningful time period	NA
Other analyses	17	Report other analyses done—eg analyses of subgroups and interactions, and sensitivity analyses	NA
Discussion			
Key results	18	Summarise key results with reference to study objectives	14
Limitations			
Interpretation	20	Give a cautious overall interpretation of results considering objectives, limitations, multiplicity of analyses, results from similar studies, and other relevant evidence	17
Generalisability	21	Discuss the generalisability (external validity) of the study results	17
Other information			
Funding	22	Give the source of funding and the role of the funders for the present study and, if applicable, for the original study on which the present article is based	20

*Give information separately for cases and controls in case-control studies and, if applicable, for exposed and unexposed groups in cohort and cross-sectional studies.

Note: An Explanation and Elaboration article discusses each checklist item and gives methodological background and published examples of transparent reporting. The STROBE checklist is best used in conjunction with this article (freely available on the Web sites of PLoS Medicine at <http://www.plosmedicine.org/>, Annals of Internal Medicine at <http://www.annals.org/>, and Epidemiology at <http://www.epidem.com/>). Information on the STROBE Initiative is available at www.strobe-statement.org.

BMJ Open

Incidence and risk factors of depressive symptoms in four years of follow-up among mid-aged and elderly community-dwelling Chinese adults: Findings from the China health and Retirement Longitudinal Study

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Complete List of Authors:	Wen, Yue; West China Hospital, Sichuan University, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery Liu, Chunjuan; West China Hospital, Sichuan University, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery Liao, Jing; West China Hospital, Sichuan University, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery Yin, Yiqiong; West China Hospital, Sichuan University, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery Wu, Dongmei; University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, The Clinical Hospital of Chengdu Brain Science Institute, MOE Key Lab for Neuroinformation; The Fourth People's Hospital of Chengdu & Chengdu Mental Health Center, Psychiatric Research Laboratory
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3 **Incidence and risk factors of depressive symptoms in four years of follow-up among mid-**
4 **aged and elderly community-dwelling Chinese adults: Findings from the China Health and**
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7 **Retirement Longitudinal Study**
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10 Yue Wen, Chunjuan Liu, Jing Liao, Yiqiong Yin*, Dongmei Wu*

11
12 Correspondence should be made to:

13
14 Dongmei Wu, PhD, RN

15
16 Department of Nursing, The Clinical Hospital of Chengdu Brain Science Institute, MOE Key

17
18 Lab for Neuroinformation, University of Electronic Science and Technology of China

19
20 Huli West 1st Lane, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, 610036.

21
22 Tel: 86-28-69515754

23
24 E-mail: wudongmei_2001@163.com

25
26 Yiqiong Yin, BN, RN

27
28 Chief Superintendent Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital,

29
30 Sichuan University

31
32 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, 610041.

33
34 Tel: 86-28-85422877

35
36 E-mail: yiqiong489@163.com

37
38 *: Yiqiong Yin and Dongmei Wu were co-corresponding authors for this manuscript.

39
40 The full names, institutions, city, and country of all other co-authors:

41
42 Yue Wen, BN, RN

43
44 Supervisor Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan

45
46 University

47
48 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: wenyue19820327@163.com

1
2
3 Chunjuan Liu, BN, RN
4

5 Supervisor Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan
6
7 University
8

9
10 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: liuchunjuan2002@163.com
11

12 Jing Liao, MSN, RN
13

14 Senior Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan University
15

16 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: m15982277765@163.com
17
18

19 Yiqiong Yin, BN, RN
20

21 Chief Superintendent Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital,
22
23 Sichuan University
24

25 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: yiqiong489@163.com
26
27

28 Dongmei Wu, PhD, RN
29

30 Assistant Professor, Department of Nursing, The Clinical Hospital of Chengdu Brain Science
31

32 Institute, MOE Key Lab for Neuroinformation, University of Electronic Science and Technology
33
34 of China
35

36 Huli West 1st Lane, Chengdu, China, 610036. Tel: 86-28-69515754. E-mail:
37

38 wudongmei_2001@163.com
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Abstract

Objectives. The purpose of this study was to examine the incidence of depressive symptoms, and determine if baseline risk factors conferred a risk for incident depressive symptoms over time in a nationally representative sample of mid-aged and elderly Chinese population.

Design. This study was a secondary analysis of a prospective cohort from a nationally representative sample.

Setting. Community samples in 28 provinces of China were recruited from the baseline survey of the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study. A four-stage, stratified, cluster probability sampling strategy was used, which included 10,257 households with members aged 45 years or older and their spouse.

Participants. A total of 11,533 participants free of depressive symptoms at baseline were identified, and 10,288 were re-examined in either the first and/or the second follow-up surveys. The current analyses were conducted among the 10,288 participants.

Primary and secondary outcome measures. Depressive symptoms were measured by the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale short form.

Results. The findings showed that the incidence of depressive symptoms in a 4-year follow-up was as high as 22.3%. The incidence was higher in rural areas and women. Furthermore, longer sleeping duration and better self-perceived health status were both associated with lower risk of depressive symptoms. On contrary, having diabetes and chronic kidney disease at baseline increased the risk of depressive symptoms. However, baseline body mass index was not associated with the onset of depressive symptoms in this population.

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3 **Conclusions.** The findings of this study highlight the importance of developing an appropriate
4 screening test to identify depressive symptoms for those who are vulnerable and ensure these
5 individuals can receive early interventions for depressive symptoms.
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10 **Key words:** depressive symptoms, incidence, mid-aged and older adults, China
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Strengths and limitations of this study

- Since the sample was representative of community-dwelling mid-aged and older Chinese adults, the study results can be generalized to mid-aged and older Chinese adults.
- This is the first study in China to estimate the incidence of depressive symptoms in a nationally representative population in China.
- Depressive symptoms were based on self-reports instead of clinically diagnosis. Therefore, information bias may be present. However, with longitudinal design, information bias in the current study was very likely to be non-differential.
- This study was a prospective analysis of baseline risk factors with depressive symptoms at follow-up, and no causal associations between these predictors and depressive symptoms can be drawn from the analysis.

Introduction

Depression has been recognized as a leading cause of disability and a major contributor to disease burdens globally ¹. An estimated 322 million adults had depression in 2015 worldwide, with nearly half of these people living in the South-East Asia and Western Pacific regions ². In China, about 4.2% adult population was estimated to be depressed, and the prevalence of depression reached a peak in older adulthood ². With fast economic growth, mid-aged adults are exposed to a high-stress lifestyle, which is thought to contribute significantly to an increase in mental health disorders in susceptible people ¹. Older adults, on the other hand, face noteworthy challenges to their life, including loss of independence, loss of social support due to the death of a spouse or weakened family connectedness (traditionally referred to as ‘filial piety’), financial difficulties, and medical vulnerability ³. Late-life depressive symptoms increase risk for significant impairment in social function ³, dementia ⁴, declined quality of life ⁵, and suicide ⁶. They further complicate the prognosis of concurrent medical problems by increasing physical disability and decreasing motivation and adherence to prescribed medications and/or exercise or rehabilitation programs ^{7 8}.

Although depression has come to be regarded as the common cold of psychosocial functioning in Western culture, mental disorders are still viewed as degrading not only to the patient, but also to the entire family in Chinese culture ^{9 10}. In addition, although effective interventions have been developed to alleviate symptoms of depression, depressive symptoms are often overlooked among the elderly, since most of them mistakenly consider these symptoms to be part of the normal ageing process ¹¹. Therefore, older adults may not actively seek medical treatment and leave their depressive symptoms undiagnosed or untreated. As persons aged 45 or older will increase from 32% to 51% of the total population from 2010 to 2040 in China ¹²,

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3 reliable and up-to-date estimates of the proportion of this population affected by depressive
4 symptoms are a key ingredient of effective health policy, planning, and evaluation.
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8 Recently, a number of population-based studies have estimated prevalence of depressive
9 symptoms among mid-aged and older Chinese adults ^{3 11 13 14}. Given that all these studies were
10 cross-sectional, the incidence of depressive symptoms among mid-aged and older Chinese adults
11 was not clear. Furthermore, despite a myriad of studies that examined a number of health
12 conditions associated with an increased risk of mid- and late-life depressive symptoms, including
13 chronic diseases, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status ^{3 14-17}, the
14 prospective relationships between these health conditions and depressive symptoms have not
15 been well understood in this population. Such prospective relationships may provide further
16 evidence on how baseline conditions may be predictive of depressive symptoms in the follow-up
17 than cross-sectional analysis, especially given that these health conditions are expected to be a
18 great challenge to an increasing aging population, and can often co-occur with depressive
19 symptoms which may make these conditions worse ³. A better understanding of these
20 associations may also provide information that is useful in identifying patients who are
21 vulnerable to mid-life or late-life depressive symptoms, and proactively assessing and treating
22 modifiable risk factors during primary health care service.
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42 Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the incidence of depressive
43 symptoms among mid-aged and older adults in China, and determine if baseline sleep duration,
44 body weight, self-perceived health status, and chronic conditions conferred a risk for incident
45 depressive symptoms over time, using baseline and four years of follow-up data from the China
46 Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS).
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53 **Methods**

Study Design

This study was a secondary analysis of prospective data from the CHARLS. The CHARLS is a nationwide, community-engaged, population-based epidemiological study of Chinese adults aged 45 years or older. The purpose of the CHARLS was to obtain detailed information regarding the dynamics of retirement and how it interacts with health, health insurance, and economic well-being. The CHARLS collects detailed information on a wide range of domains, including demographics, health status, physical measures, employment history, pension insurance, retirement, income, expenditures and assets¹⁸. The current study used data from baseline, the first, and the second follow-up surveys.

Participants

The CHARLS national baseline survey was conducted in 28 provinces (Tibet, Ningxia, and Hainan were not included) across the country from May 2011 to March 2012. It was a survey of 10,257 households with members aged 45 years or older and their spouse, for a total of about 17,708 individuals. A four-stage, stratified, cluster probability sampling strategy was used to select eligible participants¹⁸. Details of the sampling procedure are published elsewhere¹⁹. In brief, in the first stage, all counties were grouped by gross domestic product and by urban or rural regions. In the second stage, counties were stratified and sampled using probabilities proportional to size (PPS). Three rural villages and urban neighborhoods were randomly selected as primary sampling units (PSUs) using PPS in each county. In the third stage, all buildings in each PSU were recognized on Google Earth. A sample of 24 households was randomly selected among all households in each PSU. In the final stage, a short screening form was employed to ensure study eligibility in selected households and members of 45 years of age or above were

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3 invited to enroll into the study. The response rate for the survey was over 80% (94% in rural
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5 areas and 69% in urban areas) ¹⁸.
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8 The baseline cohort of the CHARLS participants was followed up every two years with
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10 the same survey questionnaires and biomedical measures ¹⁸. The first follow-up survey of the
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12 CHARLS was fielded between July 2013 and January 2014. Subjects in this study used the same
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14 inclusion and exclusion criteria as the original study. A total of 11,533 participants free of
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16 depressive symptoms at baseline were identified, of whom 9,329 participated in the first follow-
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18 up survey in 2013-2014, 9,157 were examined in the second follow-up survey in 2015-2016, and
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20 10,288 were followed in either the first or the second follow-up surveys. The current analyses
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22 were conducted among the 10,288 participants.
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26 **Patient and Public Involvement**

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28 Participants with abnormal findings, including depressive symptoms were suggested to
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30 visit a physician for further clinical evaluation. In the current study, we used de-identified data
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32 from the CHARLS with no direct involvement of or interaction with participants in the design,
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34 recruitment or conduct of the original cohort study.
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38 **Variables, Definitions, and Measures**

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40 **Depressive symptoms.** The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-
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42 D) short form was used to measure depressive symptoms ²⁰. The CES-D short form consists of
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44 ten items, and each item was rated on a four-point Likert scale with answers ranging from 0
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46 (rarely or none of the time) to 3 (most or all of the time) with the total possible summary score of
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48 0 to 30. The time frame for the CES-D short form refers to the week prior to interview. Item 5
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50 (“feeling hopeful about the future”) and 8 (“feeling happy”) were reversely scored before
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3 analysis. Higher scores corresponds to higher levels of depressive symptoms, and a score of 12
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5 or higher has been used as the cut-off point for depressive symptoms ²¹.
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8 The CES-D short form has been validated among a subsample of 742 CHARLS
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10 participants aged 60 years and older, showing adequate psychometric properties ²¹.
11
12 Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the two-factor model had the best fit. Depressive affect
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14 and somatic retardation were loaded as the first factor, and positive affect was loaded as the
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16 second factor. The two-factor structure varied across both genders in multi-group analysis ($\chi^2=$
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18 144.13, $p<0.001$). R^2 coefficient was used to measure the reliability of each item, and some of
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20 them differed between both gender groups. For example, depressive affect and somatic
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22 retardation accounted for 37% and 64% of the variance in the depression indicator (“bothered”)
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24 for the males and females, respectively ²¹.
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28 **Measure of health conditions associated with depressive symptoms.** These factors
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30 included chronic conditions, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status.
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32 Information on chronic conditions was primarily based on self-reports except hypertension and
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34 diabetes. Participants were asked if they had been diagnosed with any of the following health
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36 conditions: arthritis, dyslipidemia, cancer (excluding minor skin cancers), liver diseases (except
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38 for fatty liver, tumors or cancer), cardiovascular diseases (heart attack, coronary heart disease,
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40 angina, congestive heart failure, or other heart problems), stroke, kidney disease (except for
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42 cancer or tumor), stomach or other gastrointestinal diseases (except for tumor or cancer),
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44 memory-related diseases, and asthma. Participants answered “yes” to these questions were
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46 defined as having these doctor-diagnosed conditions.
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51 Hypertension was defined based on the most current guidelines from the American Heart
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53 Association, which have lowered the threshold of hypertension cut-off points to 130/80 mmHg ²².
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3 A systolic blood pressure measurement of 130 mmHg and higher, or a diastolic measurement of
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5 80 mmHg and higher, or 130/80 mmHg and higher, or taking antihypertensive medications
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7 including modern western medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, or using other treatment for
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9 hypertension was considered as having hypertension²². Blood pressure was measured three
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11 times (approximately 45 seconds apart) for each participant on the left arm in sitting position,
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13 using an electronic blood pressure monitor (Omron™ HEM-7112)²³.
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17 The diagnosis of diabetes was based on the current guidelines from the American
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19 Diabetes Association (2018). Readings of 126 mg/dL or higher for fasting blood glucose \geq 126
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21 mg/dL, or readings of 200 mg/dL or higher for random blood glucose, or readings of 6.5% or
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23 higher for glycated hemoglobin, or use of insulin, or taking oral hypoglycemic medications
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25 including traditional Chinese medicine, modern western medicine, or other diabetes treatment
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27 was considered as having diabetes²⁴.
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31 Weight was measured to the nearest 0.1 kg using a digital scale (Omron™ HN-286,
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33 Yangzhou, China) on an even, uncarpeted surface, with participants removing heavy outer
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35 clothing. Height was measured without shoes to the nearest 0.1 cm using a stadiometer
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37 (Seca™213, Hangzhou, China). Body mass index (BMI, weight in kilograms divided by height
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39 in meters squared) was calculated from the participants' weight and height.
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43 Self-perceived health status is a powerful indicator of the health status of elderly people
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45²⁵. It was measured based on self-reports to the following question, “Would you rate health
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47 as...”, with five response options provided: excellent, very good, good, fair, and poor.
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50 Sleep duration in hours was collected using a question, “During the past month, how
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52 many hours of actual sleep did you get at night (average hours for one night)? (This may be
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54 shorter than the number of hours you spend in bed.)”
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3 **Covariates.** Factors that could confound the main association were identified a priori
4 from current literature. Covariates included age, gender³, education²⁶, and marital status^{3 27}.
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6 Consistent with a prior CHARLS publication²⁸, education was categorized as illiterate or no
7 formal education, some primary school but can read and write, primary school including home
8 schooling, and middle school or above. Marital status was grouped as married versus not married.
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14 **Ethical Considerations**

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17 The CHARLS was approved by the Ethical Review Committee. The current study is a
18 secondary analysis of the de-identified CHARLS public data. The Ethics Review Committee
19 granted the current study exemption from review.
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23 **Statistical Analysis**

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26 **Incidence of depressive symptoms.** The incidence of depressive symptoms was
27 analyzed taking into account the complex survey design and nonresponse rate in both estimates
28 and the corresponding standard errors (SEs). Participants were categorized into 5-year age
29 groups. SAS PROC SURVEYFREQ procedure was used to obtain the overall and gender
30 specific incidence of depressive symptoms among all participants and by the 5-year age groups.
31
32 In addition, overall and gender-specific incidence of depressive symptoms was estimated by
33 rural and urban areas. We estimated the incidence of four outcomes of depressive symptoms:
34 having depressive symptoms in the first follow-up survey (2013-2014); having depressive
35 symptoms in the second follow-up survey (2015-2016); ever having depressive symptoms in the
36 first or the second follow-up survey; and consistently having depressive symptoms in both
37 follow-up surveys.
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51 **Prospective analysis.** Baseline characteristics of the participants were summarized as
52 frequency and percentage for categorical variables and mean and standard deviation or median
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3 and interquartile range for continuous variables. Associations of baseline health behaviors,
4 including chronic conditions, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status,
5 with the incidence of ever having depressive symptoms in 4 years of follow-up were evaluated
6 by a multivariate logistic regression model, while controlling for all covariates as mentioned
7 above. Odds ratios (ORs) and the corresponding 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were reported.
8 The SAS 9.4 (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, North Carolina) was used to perform the analyses. All the
9 p values were two-sided, and $p < 0.05$ was considered significant.

19 Results

21 Sample Characteristics

22 A total of 10,288 participants aged 45 years or older were included in the estimate of
23 depressive symptoms incidence. As shown in Table 1, the average age of all participants was
24 58.5 years and roughly half participants (49.3%) were women. Most of the participants (73.3%)
25 lived in rural areas and 60.6% participants had education of primary school or above. The
26 majority of participants (90.0%) were married or living with a partner at the time of data
27 collection. About a third of the participants (31.5%) were current smokers and 17.9% were
28 current regular drinkers. Participants had an average BMI of 23.7 kg/m². The mean duration of
29 sleep per night was 6.7 hours, and less than 20% of participants perceived their health as very
30 good or excellent. The mean CES-D short form score was 5.1 at baseline.

44 Incidence of Depressive Symptoms

45 As shown in Table 2 and in Figure 1, the incidence of ever having depressive symptoms
46 in 4 years was 22.3% (95% CI: 21.3%-23.3%). The incidence was much higher in rural areas
47 than that in urban areas (25.7% vs. 15.3%, $p < 0.0001$). Women had higher incidence of
48 depressive symptoms than men (27.9% vs. 16.7%, $p < 0.0001$). There is no clear pattern of the
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3 incidence of depressive symptoms over age groups (Figure 1). The incidence was highest among
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5 the 65-70 years of age group and lowest among the 45-50 years of age group.
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8 **Baseline Risk Factors and Incident Depressive Symptoms**

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10 As shown in Table 3, in the fully adjusted multivariable logistic regression model,
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12 sleeping duration and self-perceived health status were both inversely associated with the risk of
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14 depressive symptoms. Specifically, participants with an hour longer of sleeping had a 10% (95%
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16 CI: 7%-13%, $p < 0.0001$) lower risk of developing depressive symptoms in 4 years of follow up.
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18 Compared to individuals who perceived their health status as poor, those who perceived their
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20 health status as fair, good, very good, and excellent had 42% (95% CI: 39%-52%), 47% (95% CI:
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22 36%-57%), 64% (95% CI: 54%-72%), and 62% (95% CI: 43%-74%) lower risk of developing
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24 depressive symptoms, respectively. In addition, three chronic conditions, diabetes (OR=1.19, 95%
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26 CI: 1.00-1.42, $p = 0.04$), chronic kidney disease (OR=1.37, 95% CI: 1.05-1.79, $p = 0.02$), chronic
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28 digestive disorders (OR=1.15, 95% CI: 1.01-1.31, $p = 0.04$), and arthritis (OR=1.43, 95% CI:
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30 1.28-1.61, $p < 0.0001$) were associated with higher risk of depressive symptoms. However,
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32 baseline BMI was not associated with the onset of depressive symptoms in this population
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34 (OR=0.99, 95% CI: 0.97-1.01). Chronic lung disease ($p = 0.001$), chronic liver disease ($p = 0.004$),
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36 and asthma ($p = 0.02$) were positively associated with incidence of depressive disorder in the raw
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38 analysis, but became non-significant in the fully adjusted model (all $p > 0.05$).
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45 **Discussion**

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47 Through analysis to data of a nationally representative sample of mid-aged and older
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49 Chinese adults, we found that the incidence of depressive symptoms in a 4-year follow-up was as
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51 high as 22.3%. Large disparities in the incidence of depressive symptoms were observed
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53 between rural and urban areas and between men and women. Furthermore, longer sleeping
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3 duration and better self-perceived health status were both associated with lower risk of
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5 depressive symptoms. On contrary, having diabetes and chronic kidney disease at baseline
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7 increased the risk of depressive symptoms. However, baseline BMI was not associated with
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9 depressive symptoms in this population.
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12 This is the first study that examined the incidence of depressive symptoms in a nationally
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14 representative population in China. Our study found that in 4 years of follow-up, as high as 22.3%
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16 of the mid-aged and older Chinese adults developed depressive symptoms. Using the same
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18 database, a recent study reported that the prevalence of depressive symptoms at CHARLS
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20 baseline survey was up to 26.2%¹³. Collectively, these findings revealed that depressive
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22 symptoms were a major public health challenge in China, and intervention programs should be
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24 developed to reduce the burden of depressive symptoms. Furthermore, large disparities were also
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26 observed between rural and urban residents and between men and women. In particular, women
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28 and residents living in rural areas were at a higher risk of developing depressive symptoms. The
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30 high incidence rate is not only relevant to middle-aged and older Chinese adults, it also has
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32 implications for younger generations of the Chinese. Many depressive symptoms cases remained
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34 undiagnosed, and even among those who were aware of the condition, very few sought
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36 treatments due to cultural stigma^{9 10}. Middle-aged and elderly grandparents are the primary
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38 caregivers of infants, toddlers, and young children in rural China. Depressed caregivers were
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40 more likely to show negative parenting interactions (e.g., limited facial and behavioral affect)
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42 with their children, and these interactions were directly relevant for children's development^{29 30}.
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44 A strong negative correlation has been reported between the levels of depression of
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46 grandmothers and the levels of developmental outcomes of the grandchildren in their care,
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48 including cognitive, language, social-emotional, and motor functions^{31 32}. Taken together,
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3 changes in social policies and intervention programs should be developed to address timely
4 diagnosis and treatment of depression for these people, which will help improve young
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6 children's developmental outcomes in rural China.
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10 Individuals with longer sleep duration had lower risk of depressive symptoms. This
11 finding is in line with previous studies^{33 34}. Sleep disorders are often the presenting and core
12 symptoms of depression³⁵. However, treatment of depression did not resolve sleep symptoms,
13 which may confer a greater risk for depression recurrence and relapse³⁵. Therefore, sleep
14 deprivation should be at least considered as an early indicator of depressive symptoms.
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16 Individuals with sleep deprivation should be aware of their high risk of depressive symptoms and
17 manage to improve the length of their sleeping.
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26 Better self-perceived health status also reduced the risk of depressive symptoms in the
27 current study. The finding is consistent with studies among other populations^{36 37}. Self-perceived
28 health is a powerful indicator of the overall health status of elderly people²⁵. Many factors,
29 including sociodemographic characteristics, chronic disease, functional status, social
30 relationships, neighborhood environment, and nutrition pattern, were all important determinants
31 of self-perceived health²⁵. These factors are also associated with depressive symptoms. The
32 current study adjusted most of the factors, except for functional status, social relationship, and
33 nutrition pattern, which were not available in the CHARLS database. However, poorer self-
34 perceived health status was still significantly associated with higher risk of depressive symptoms.
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36 Future studies additionally controlling for those factors will help to evaluate the contribution of
37 those factors on the associations of self-perceived health status with depressive symptoms.
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39 Furthermore, such study may also help delineate whether self-perceived health status may
40 represent other factors that may lead to depressive symptoms. Finally, individuals with
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3 depressive disorders were more likely to report poor self-perceived health^{38 39}. Therefore, there
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5 might be a bidirectional association between depressive symptoms and self-perceived health.
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8 Future studies examining the bi-directional relationship are warranted.
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10 Among 12 chronic conditions, baseline chronic kidney disease increased the risk of
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12 depressive symptoms at follow-up. Although the underlying mechanisms have not been well
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14 understood, some authors suggested that the psychosocial and biologic changes in dialysis may
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16 explain this relationship⁴⁰. In addition to chronic kidney disease, baseline diabetes also
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18 conferred a higher risk of symptoms of depression over time in this study. Similar results were
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20 reported in a meta-analysis of 11 studies, which found that people with diabetes at baseline had a
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22 24% higher risk of developing depression at follow-up compared to those without diabetes⁴¹. In
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24 addition, high prevalence of depression among people with diabetes and/or chronic kidney
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26 disease has also been observed in cross-sectional studies⁴²⁻⁴⁴. In concordance with these findings,
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28 this study added further evidence that compared to other chronic conditions at baseline, baseline
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30 chronic disease and diabetes were more likely to be associated with depressive symptoms over
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32 time in a population of mid-aged and older Chinese population.
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37 Overweight/obesity is well established to interfere with mental health, with depressive
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39 symptoms being more common among overweight/obese individuals than their normal-weight
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41 counterparts, especially in overweight/obese women^{45 46}. A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies
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43 further confirmed this relationship, in which excess weight at baseline increased a higher risk for
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45 incident depression at follow-up⁴⁷. In contrast to these findings from Western and European
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47 countries, using data from a prospective survey of a large, representative sample of mid-aged and
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49 elderly community-dwelling residents in Mainland China, we did not find a relationship between
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51 baseline BMI and subsequent depressive symptoms over time. These inconsistent findings may
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3 suggest that because participants in the current study were predominantly low in BMI at baseline
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5 (mean BMI was 23.7 kg/m²), their likelihood of experiencing depressive symptoms may have
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7 been lower compared to those participants reported in Luppino et al ⁴⁷. However, these are
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9 preliminary findings that need to be further investigated in future prospective studies in this
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11 population.
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15 The study has several important strengths. First, to the best of our knowledge, this is the
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17 first study to estimate incidence of depressive symptoms in a nationally representative sample of
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19 middle-aged and older Chinese adults. Previous studies have focused on the estimation of
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21 depressive symptoms prevalence ^{48 49} or investigated the incidence of depressive symptoms in a
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23 regional sample ⁵⁰. Second, since the sample was representative of community-dwelling mid-
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25 aged and older Chinese adults, the results can be generalized to mid-aged and older Chinese
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27 adults. Third, a Chinese specific cut-off point of the CES-D short form score for depressive
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29 symptoms has been used, and the cut-off point was validated among middle-aged and older
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31 Chinese adults ²¹. Therefore, our study provided more reliable estimate of the incidence of
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33 depressive symptoms. Finally, strict quality control measures, including GPS matching, data
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35 checking, recording and checking interviews, and calling back participants, were implemented at
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37 each stage of the study to ensure data quality and reliability.
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43 There were also some limitations in this study that should be acknowledged. First,
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45 depressive symptoms were based on self-reports instead of clinically diagnosis. Therefore,
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47 information bias may be present. However, with longitudinal design, information bias in the
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49 current study was very likely to be non-differential. Since non-differential misclassification
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51 generally bias the association estimates towards the null, our study findings were more robust.
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53 Second, nighttime sleep duration was also measured based on self-reports. The use of self-
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3 reported measures in the CHARLS surveys may have biased study results, since participants may
4 consistently under- or overestimate their nighttime sleep duration ⁵¹. Objective or direct
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6 measures of sleep duration should be used to increase precision and accuracy of self-report
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8 assessment. Finally, this study was a prospective analysis of baseline risk factors with depressive
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10 symptoms at follow-up, and no causal associations between these predictors and depressive
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12 symptoms can be drawn from the analysis.
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17 The findings of the current study have important implications for clinical practice. Health
18 care professionals are especially encouraged to address the needs for better mental health in
19 elderly population ⁵². In view of the high incidence of depressive symptoms (22.3%) among mid-
20 aged and elderly Chinese, the findings of this study highlight the importance of developing an
21 appropriate screening test to identify depressive symptoms for those who are vulnerable and
22 ensure these individuals can receive early interventions for depressive symptoms. The screening
23 test should include items such as areas of living (rural or urban areas), gender, age groups,
24 nighttime sleep duration, self-perceived health status, and certain chronic conditions, especially
25 chronic kidney disease and diabetes. In addition, intervention strategies that address short
26 nighttime sleep duration may be used to alleviate depressive symptoms and improve mental
27 health in this population. Intervention programs should also be prioritized to target at specific
28 populations, such as women and residents living in rural areas, as these populations were at a
29 higher risk of developing depressive symptoms. Finally, new patients with chronic kidney
30 disease and diabetes should be screened for depression using the CES-D short form at initial visit.
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32 Persons with depressive symptoms (a score of 12 or higher) should then be assessed by a
33 clinician using the structured clinical interview for Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental
34 Disorders, Fifth Edition. Potential participants with serious depressive symptoms should be
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3 referred immediately to a mental health professional. Individuals with these two conditions are
4 particularly vulnerable to the deleterious effects of affective symptoms, since symptoms of
5 depression is a known risk factor for noncompliance with medical treatment and adverse health
6 outcomes^{53 54}.
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11 12 **Conclusions**

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14 To conclude, our study found a high incidence of depressive symptoms in 4 years of
15 follow-up among a nationally representative mid-aged and older Chinese population. In addition,
16 great disparities in the incidence of depressive symptoms were observed between individuals
17 lived in rural and urban areas and between men and women. Furthermore, we identified that
18 worse self-perceived health, shorter duration of sleeping, diabetes and chronic kidney disease at
19 baseline increased the risk for depressive symptoms. These findings supported the importance of
20 baseline status to longitudinal changes in depressive symptoms. Thus, interventions for
21 vulnerable mid-aged and older adults should focus on addressing short nighttime sleep duration.
22 These findings also help identify individuals at higher risk for depressive symptoms, such as
23 those with chronic kidney disease and diabetes, or women and residents living in rural areas, so
24 that early interventions can be implemented to prevent depressive symptoms.
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40 **Figure Legend**

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42 Figure 1. The Incidence of Depressive Symptoms in 4 Years of Follow-up among
43 Participants of the CHARLS
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Contributorship Statement

All authors contribute to the conception and design of this study. YW, YY, and DW were responsible for the design, analysis, drafting and revision of this manuscript. CL and JL were responsible for interpretation of data and preparation of the manuscript.

Competing Interests Statement

None declared.

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Patient Consent for Publication

Not required.

Data Sharing Statement

The study used a public data from the CHARLS that were obtained from the CHARLS home page at <http://charls.pku.edu.cn/en>.

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Tables

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of the CHARLS participants free of depressive symptoms

Variable	Distribution
N	10,288
age, years, mean (SD)	58.5 (9.8)
Male, n (%)	5845 (50.7%)
Living in rural areas, n (%)	8,440 (73.3%)
Education, n (%)	
<i>No formal education or illiterate</i>	2,736 (23.7%)
<i>Some primary school</i>	1,804 (15.7%)
<i>Finished primary school</i>	2,590 (22.5%)
<i>Junior high school or above</i>	4,394 (38.1%)
Currently married, n (%)	10,375 (90.0%)
Smoking status, n (%)	
<i>Current smoker</i>	3,629 (31.5%)
<i>Former smoker</i>	1,034 (9.0%)
<i>Never smoking</i>	6,868 (60.0%)
Drinking status, n (%)	
<i>Regular drinkers</i>	1,951 (17.9%)
<i>Occasional drinkers</i>	476 (4.4%)
<i>Former drinkers</i>	646 (5.9%)
<i>Never drinking</i>	7,833 (71.8%)
Weight, kg, mean (SD)	60 (11.8)
Height, m, mean (SD)	1.6 (0.1)
Body mass index, kg/m ² , mean (SD)	23.7 (4)
Sleeping duration, hours, mean (SD)	6.7 (1.7)
CES-D short form score	5.1 (3.3)
Self-perceived health status, n (%)	
<i>Excellent</i>	483 (4.2%)
<i>Very good</i>	1,744 (15.1%)
<i>Good</i>	4,136 (35.9%)
<i>Fair</i>	3,977 (34.5%)
<i>Poor</i>	1,187 (10.3%)
Chronic conditions, n (%)	
<i>Hypertension</i>	4,045 (40.3%)
<i>Dyslipidemia</i>	1,016 (9.0%)
<i>Diabetes</i>	1,210 (15.0%)
<i>Cancer</i>	97 (0.8%)
<i>Liver disease</i>	387 (3.4%)
<i>Heart disease</i>	1,162 (10.1%)
<i>Stroke</i>	188 (1.6%)
<i>Kidney disease</i>	563 (4.9%)

<i>Gastrointestinal disease</i>	2,180 (18.9%)
<i>Dementia</i>	105 (0.9%)
<i>Arthritis</i>	3,221 (28.0%)
<i>Asthma</i>	312 (2.7%)

Note. CES-D=Center for Epidemiologic Study of Depression short form; SD=standard deviation.

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Table 2. Incidence of depressive symptoms among the CHARLS participants

	Ever having depressive Symptoms	Depressive symptoms in both visits 2 & 3	Depressive symptoms in 2 years	Depressive symptoms in 4 years
Overall	22.3 (21.3-23.3)	4.4 (4.0-4.9)	13.2 (12.5-14.1)	16.8 (15.9-17.7)
Rural	25.7 (24.6-26.8)	5.3 (4.8-5.8)	15.3 (14.3-16.2)	18.8 (17.8-19.8)
Urban	15.3 (13.4-17.2)	2.6 (1.9-3.3)	9.0 (7.4-10.6)	12.2 (10.4-14.1)
Men	16.7 (15.5-17.9)	3.0 (2.5-3.5)	9.9 (9.0-10.9)	12.2 (11.1-13.2)
Women	27.9 (26.4-29.4)	5.8 (5.1-6.6)	16.6 (15.3-17.9)	21.5 (20.1-22.9)

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Table 3. Raw and multi-variables adjusted associations with the incidence of depressive symptoms in 4 years of follow-up.

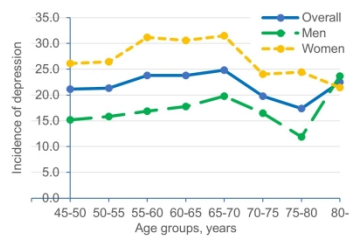
Variables	Multi-Variate Adjusted		Raw Association	
	OR (95% CI)	P	OR (95% CI)	P
Age, per year older	0.99 (0.98-0.99)	0.001	0.99 (0.99-1.00)	0.59
Male vs. Female	0.60 (0.51-0.71)	<.0001	0.51 (0.46-0.56)	<.0001
Education level				
<i>No formal education or illiterate</i>	ref.	<.0001	ref.	<.0001
<i>Some primary school</i>	1.06 (0.90-1.25)		0.93 (0.80-1.08)	
<i>Finished primary school</i>	0.83 (0.71-0.97)		0.67 (0.57-0.77)	
<i>Junior high school or above</i>	0.71 (0.61-0.84)		0.48 (0.42-0.55)	
Rural vs. Urban	1.61 (1.38-1.88)	<.0001	1.72 (1.50-1.96)	<.0001
Not married vs Married	1.25 (1.04-1.51)	0.02	1.28 (1.08-1.51)	0.004
Smoking status				
<i>Non-smokers</i>	ref.		ref.	
<i>Current smokers</i>	1.02 (0.86-1.20)	0.03	0.51 (0.41-0.62)	<.0001
<i>Former smokers</i>	0.75 (0.59-0.96)		0.68 (0.60-0.76)	
Drinking status				
<i>Never drinkers</i>	Ref.		ref.	
<i>Former drinkers</i>	1.02 (0.80-1.30)	0.15	0.84 (0.67-1.04)	<.0001
<i>Occasional drinkers</i>	0.79 (0.59-1.06)		0.59 (0.45-0.78)	
<i>Regular drinkers</i>	0.85 (0.71-1.01)		0.59 (0.51-0.68)	
Body mass index, per 1 kg/m ² increase	0.99 (0.98-1.01)	0.20	0.99 (0.98-1.00)	0.14
Self-perceived health status				
<i>Excellent</i>	0.36 (0.25-0.52)	<.0001	0.28 (0.20-0.39)	<.0001
<i>Very good</i>	0.36 (0.29-0.45)		0.28 (0.23-0.35)	
<i>Good</i>	0.53 (0.44-0.63)		0.45 (0.38-0.53)	
<i>Fair</i>	0.61 (0.52-0.73)		0.56 (0.48-0.66)	
<i>Poor</i>	ref.		ref.	
Sleep duration, per hour longer	0.89 (0.87-0.92)	<.0001	0.88 (0.85-0.90)	<.0001
Hypertension (Y vs. N)	1.07 (0.95-1.21)	0.25	1.07 (0.96-1.18)	0.22
Dyslipidemia (Y vs. N)	0.85 (0.69-1.04)	0.12	0.91 (0.76-1.09)	0.29
Diabetes (Y vs. N)	1.19 (1.00-1.42)	0.04	1.11 (0.95-2.30)	0.19
Cancer (Y vs. N)	0.92 (0.48-1.77)	0.80	1.17 (0.65-2.12)	0.61
Chronic Lung Disease (Y vs. N)	1.18 (0.97-1.44)	0.10	1.33 (1.12-1.58)	0.001
Chronic Liver Disease (Y vs. N)	0.90 (0.67-1.22)	0.51	1.04 (0.79-1.37)	0.81
Heart Disease (Y vs. N)	1.06 (0.88-1.28)	0.54	1.27 (1.08-1.49)	0.004
Stroke (Y vs. N)	0.88 (0.56-1.39)	0.59	1.12 (0.75-1.66)	0.58
Chronic Kidney Disease (Y vs. N)	1.32 (1.04-1.67)	0.02	1.45 (1.16-1.80)	0.001
Chronic Digestive Disorders (Y vs. N)	1.15 (1.01-1.31)	0.04	1.43 (1.26-1.61)	<.0001
Psychological Disorders (Y vs. N)	1.00 (0.53-1.89)	0.99	1.44 (0.81-2.56)	0.22
Dementia (Y vs. N)	1.31 (0.72-2.38)	0.37	1.15 (0.67-1.97)	0.62
Arthritis (Y vs. N)	1.43 (1.28-1.61)	<.0001	1.72 (1.54-1.91)	<.0001
Asthma (Y vs. N)	1.25 (0.90-1.75)	0.19	1.43 (1.06-1.91)	0.02

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Note. CI=confidence interval; OR=odds ratio

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STROBE 2007 (v4) Statement—Checklist of items that should be included in reports of cohort studies

Section/Topic	Item #	Recommendation	Reported on page #
Title and abstract	1	(a) Indicate the study’s design with a commonly used term in the title or the abstract	3
		(b) Provide in the abstract an informative and balanced summary of what was done and what was found	3
Introduction			
Background/rationale	2	Explain the scientific background and rationale for the investigation being reported	6-7
Objectives	3	State specific objectives, including any prespecified hypotheses	7
Methods			
Study design	4	Present key elements of study design early in the paper	8
Setting	5	Describe the setting, locations, and relevant dates, including periods of recruitment, exposure, follow-up, and data collection	8-9
Participants	6	(a) Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of selection of participants. Describe methods of follow-up	8
		(b) For matched studies, give matching criteria and number of exposed and unexposed	NA
Variables	7	Clearly define all outcomes, exposures, predictors, potential confounders, and effect modifiers. Give diagnostic criteria, if applicable	9-11
Data sources/ measurement	8*	For each variable of interest, give sources of data and details of methods of assessment (measurement). Describe comparability of assessment methods if there is more than one group	9
Bias	9	Describe any efforts to address potential sources of bias	17
Study size	10	Explain how the study size was arrived at	8
Quantitative variables	11	Explain how quantitative variables were handled in the analyses. If applicable, describe which groupings were chosen and why	12
Statistical methods	12	(a) Describe all statistical methods, including those used to control for confounding	12
		(b) Describe any methods used to examine subgroups and interactions	NA
		(c) Explain how missing data were addressed	NA
		(d) If applicable, explain how loss to follow-up was addressed	NA
		(e) Describe any sensitivity analyses	NA
Results			

Participants	13*	(a) Report numbers of individuals at each stage of study—eg numbers potentially eligible, examined for eligibility, confirmed eligible, included in the study, completing follow-up, and analysed	8
		(b) Give reasons for non-participation at each stage	NA
		(c) Consider use of a flow diagram	NA
Descriptive data	14*	(a) Give characteristics of study participants (eg demographic, clinical, social) and information on exposures and potential confounders	13
		(b) Indicate number of participants with missing data for each variable of interest	NA
		(c) Summarise follow-up time (eg, average and total amount)	8
Outcome data	15*	Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures over time	NA
Main results	16	(a) Give unadjusted estimates and, if applicable, confounder-adjusted estimates and their precision (eg, 95% confidence interval). Make clear which confounders were adjusted for and why they were included	11, 13-14
		(b) Report category boundaries when continuous variables were categorized	NA
		(c) If relevant, consider translating estimates of relative risk into absolute risk for a meaningful time period	NA
Other analyses	17	Report other analyses done—eg analyses of subgroups and interactions, and sensitivity analyses	NA
Discussion			
Key results	18	Summarise key results with reference to study objectives	14
Limitations			
Interpretation	20	Give a cautious overall interpretation of results considering objectives, limitations, multiplicity of analyses, results from similar studies, and other relevant evidence	17
Generalisability	21	Discuss the generalisability (external validity) of the study results	17
Other information			
Funding	22	Give the source of funding and the role of the funders for the present study and, if applicable, for the original study on which the present article is based	20

*Give information separately for cases and controls in case-control studies and, if applicable, for exposed and unexposed groups in cohort and cross-sectional studies.

Note: An Explanation and Elaboration article discusses each checklist item and gives methodological background and published examples of transparent reporting. The STROBE checklist is best used in conjunction with this article (freely available on the Web sites of PLoS Medicine at <http://www.plosmedicine.org/>, Annals of Internal Medicine at <http://www.annals.org/>, and Epidemiology at <http://www.epidem.com/>). Information on the STROBE Initiative is available at www.strobe-statement.org.

BMJ Open

Incidence and risk factors of depressive symptoms in four years of follow-up among mid-aged and elderly community-dwelling Chinese adults: Findings from the China health and Retirement Longitudinal Study

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Complete List of Authors:	Wen, Yue; West China Hospital, Sichuan University, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery Liu, Chunjuan; West China Hospital, Sichuan University, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery Liao, Jing; West China Hospital, Sichuan University, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery Yin, Yiqiong; West China Hospital, Sichuan University, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery Wu, Dongmei; University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, The Clinical Hospital of Chengdu Brain Science Institute, MOE Key Lab for Neuroinformation; The Fourth People's Hospital of Chengdu & Chengdu Mental Health Center, Psychiatric Research Laboratory
Primary Subject Heading:	Mental health
Secondary Subject Heading:	Epidemiology
Keywords:	depressive symptoms, incidence, mid-aged and older adults, China

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3 **Incidence and risk factors of depressive symptoms in four years of follow-up among mid-**
4 **aged and elderly community-dwelling Chinese adults: Findings from the China Health and**
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6 **Retirement Longitudinal Study**
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9
10 Yue Wen, Chunjuan Liu, Jing Liao, Yiqiong Yin*, Dongmei Wu*

11
12 Correspondence should be made to:

13
14 Dongmei Wu, PhD, RN

15
16 Department of Nursing, The Clinical Hospital of Chengdu Brain Science Institute, MOE Key

17
18 Lab for Neuroinformation, University of Electronic Science and Technology of China

19
20 Huli West 1st Lane, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, 610036.

21
22 Tel: 86-28-69515754

23
24 E-mail: wudongmei_2001@163.com

25
26 Yiqiong Yin, BN, RN

27
28 Chief Superintendent Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital,

29
30 Sichuan University

31
32 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, 610041.

33
34 Tel: 86-28-85422877

35
36 E-mail: yiqiong489@163.com

37
38 *: Yiqiong Yin and Dongmei Wu were co-corresponding authors for this manuscript.

39
40 The full names, institutions, city, and country of all other co-authors:

41
42 Yue Wen, BN, RN

43
44 Supervisor Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan

45
46 University

47
48 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: wenyue19820327@163.com

1
2
3 Chunjuan Liu, BN, RN

4
5 Supervisor Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan
6
7 University

8
9
10 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: liuchunjuan2002@163.com

11
12 Jing Liao, MSN, RN

13
14 Senior Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan University

15
16 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: m15982277765@163.com

17
18 Yiqiong Yin, BN, RN

19
20 Chief Superintendent Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital,
21
22 Sichuan University

23
24 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: yiqiong489@163.com

25
26 Dongmei Wu, PhD, RN

27
28 Assistant Professor, Department of Nursing, The Clinical Hospital of Chengdu Brain Science

29
30 Institute, MOE Key Lab for Neuroinformation, University of Electronic Science and Technology
31
32 of China

33
34 Huli West 1st Lane, Chengdu, China, 610036. Tel: 86-28-69515754. E-mail:

35
36
37
38
39
40 wudongmei_2001@163.com

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42 Word count: 7493

Abstract

Objectives. The purpose of this study was to examine the incidence of depressive symptoms, and determine if baseline risk factors conferred a risk for incident depressive symptoms over time in a nationally representative sample of mid-aged and elderly Chinese population.

Design. This study was a secondary analysis of a prospective cohort from a nationally representative sample.

Setting. Community samples in 28 provinces of China were recruited from the baseline survey of the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study. A four-stage, stratified, cluster probability sampling strategy was used, which included 10,257 households with members aged 45 years or older and their spouse.

Participants. A total of 11,533 participants free of depressive symptoms at baseline were identified, and 10,288 were re-examined in either the first and/or the second follow-up surveys. The current analyses were conducted among the 10,288 participants.

Primary and secondary outcome measures. Depressive symptoms were measured by the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale short form.

Results. The findings showed that the incidence of depressive symptoms in a 4-year follow-up was as high as 22.3%. The incidence was much higher in rural areas (25.7%) and in women (27.9%). Furthermore, participants with an hour longer of sleeping had a 10% lower risk of developing depressive symptoms. Compared to individuals who perceived their health status as poor, those who perceived their health status as excellent had 62% lower risk of developing depressive symptoms. In addition, diabetes (OR=1.19, p=.04) and chronic kidney disease (OR=1.32, p=.02) at baseline increased the risk of depressive symptoms. However, baseline body mass index was not associated with the onset of depressive symptoms in this population.

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3 **Conclusions.** This study highlight the importance of developing an appropriate screening test to
4 identify depressive symptoms for those who are vulnerable and ensure these individuals can
5 receive early interventions for depressive symptoms.
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10 **Key words:** depressive symptoms, incidence, mid-aged and older adults, China
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Strengths and limitations of this study

- Since the sample was representative of community-dwelling mid-aged and older Chinese adults, the study results can be generalized to mid-aged and older Chinese adults.
- Depressive symptoms were based on self-reports instead of clinically diagnosis. Therefore, information bias may be present. However, with longitudinal design, information bias in the current study was very likely to be non-differential.
- This study was a prospective analysis of baseline risk factors with depressive symptoms at follow-up, and no causal associations between these predictors and depressive symptoms can be drawn from the analysis.

Introduction

Depression has been recognized as a leading cause of disability and a major contributor to disease burdens globally¹. An estimated 322 million adults had depression in 2015 worldwide, with nearly half of these people living in the South-East Asia and Western Pacific regions². In China, about 4.2% adult population was estimated to be depressed, and the prevalence of depression reached a peak in older adulthood². With fast economic growth, mid-aged adults are exposed to a high-stress lifestyle, which is thought to contribute significantly to an increase in mental health disorders in susceptible people¹. Older adults, on the other hand, face noteworthy challenges to their life, including loss of independence, loss of social support due to the death of a spouse or weakened family connectedness (traditionally referred to as ‘filial piety’), financial difficulties, and medical vulnerability³. Late-life depressive symptoms increase risk for significant impairment in social function³, dementia⁴, declined quality of life⁵, and suicide⁶. They further complicate the prognosis of concurrent medical problems by increasing physical disability and decreasing motivation and adherence to prescribed medications and/or exercise or rehabilitation programs^{7,8}.

Although depression has come to be regarded as the common cold of psychosocial functioning in Western culture, mental disorders are still viewed as degrading not only to the patient, but also to the entire family in Chinese culture^{9,10}. In addition, although effective interventions have been developed to alleviate symptoms of depression, depressive symptoms are often overlooked among the elderly, since most of them mistakenly consider these symptoms to be part of the normal ageing process¹¹. Therefore, older adults may not actively seek medical treatment and leave their depressive symptoms undiagnosed or untreated. As persons aged 45 or older will increase from 32% to 51% of the total population from 2010 to 2040 in China¹²,

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3 reliable and up-to-date estimates of the proportion of this population affected by depressive
4 symptoms are a key ingredient of effective health policy, planning, and evaluation.
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8 Recently, a number of population-based studies have estimated prevalence of depressive
9 symptoms among mid-aged and older Chinese adults^{3 11 13 14}. Given that all these studies were
10 cross-sectional, the incidence of depressive symptoms among mid-aged and older Chinese adults
11 was not clear. Furthermore, despite a myriad of studies that examined a number of health
12 conditions associated with an increased risk of mid- and late-life depressive symptoms, including
13 chronic diseases, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status^{3 14-17}, the
14 prospective relationships between these health conditions and depressive symptoms have not
15 been well understood in this population. Such prospective relationships may provide further
16 evidence on how baseline conditions may be predictive of depressive symptoms in the follow-up
17 than cross-sectional analysis, especially given that these health conditions are expected to be a
18 great challenge to an increasing aging population, and can often co-occur with depressive
19 symptoms which may make these conditions worse³. A better understanding of these
20 associations may also provide information that is useful in identifying patients who are
21 vulnerable to mid-life or late-life depressive symptoms, and proactively assessing and treating
22 modifiable risk factors during primary health care service.
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42 Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the incidence of depressive
43 symptoms among mid-aged and older adults in China, and determine if baseline sleep duration,
44 body weight, self-perceived health status, and chronic conditions conferred a risk for incident
45 depressive symptoms over time, using baseline and four years of follow-up data from the China
46 Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS).
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53 **Methods**

Study Design

This study was a secondary analysis of prospective data from the CHARLS. The CHARLS is a nationwide, community-engaged, population-based epidemiological study of Chinese adults aged 45 years or older. The purpose of the CHARLS was to obtain detailed information regarding the dynamics of retirement and how it interacts with health, health insurance, and economic well-being. The CHARLS collects detailed information on a wide range of domains, including demographics, health status, physical measures, employment history, pension insurance, retirement, income, expenditures and assets¹⁸. The current study used data from baseline, the first, and the second follow-up surveys.

Participants

The CHARLS national baseline survey was conducted in 28 provinces (Tibet, Ningxia, and Hainan were not included) across the country from May 2011 to March 2012. It was a survey of 10,257 households with members aged 45 years or older and their spouse, for a total of about 17,708 individuals. A four-stage, stratified, cluster probability sampling strategy was used to select eligible participants¹⁸. Details of the sampling procedure are published elsewhere¹⁹. In brief, in the first stage, all counties were grouped by gross domestic product and by urban or rural regions. In the second stage, counties were stratified and sampled using probabilities proportional to size (PPS). Three rural villages and urban neighborhoods were randomly selected as primary sampling units (PSUs) using PPS in each county. In the third stage, all buildings in each PSU were recognized on Google Earth. A sample of 24 households was randomly selected among all households in each PSU. In the final stage, a short screening form was employed to ensure study eligibility in selected households and members of 45 years of age or above were

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3 invited to enroll into the study. The response rate for the survey was over 80% (94% in rural
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5 areas and 69% in urban areas) ¹⁸.
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8 The baseline cohort of the CHARLS participants was followed up every two years with
9
10 the same survey questionnaires and biomedical measures ¹⁸. The first follow-up survey of the
11
12 CHARLS was fielded between July 2013 and January 2014. Subjects in this study used the same
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14 inclusion and exclusion criteria as the original study. A total of 11,533 participants free of
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16 depressive symptoms at baseline were identified, of whom 9,329 participated in the first follow-
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18 up survey in 2013-2014, 9,157 were examined in the second follow-up survey in 2015-2016, and
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20 10,288 were followed in either the first or the second follow-up surveys. The current analyses
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22 were conducted among the 10,288 participants.
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26 **Patient and Public Involvement**

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28 Participants with abnormal findings, including depressive symptoms were suggested to
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30 visit a physician for further clinical evaluation. In the current study, we used de-identified data
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32 from the CHARLS with no direct involvement of or interaction with participants in the design,
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34 recruitment or conduct of the original cohort study.
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38 **Variables, Definitions, and Measures**

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40 **Depressive symptoms.** The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-
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42 D) short form was used to measure depressive symptoms ²⁰. The CES-D short form consists of
43
44 ten items, and each item is rated on a four-point Likert scale with answers ranging from 0 (rarely
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46 or none of the time) to 3 (most or all of the time) with the total possible summary score of 0 to
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48 30. The time frame for the CES-D short form refers to the week prior to interview. Item 5
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50 (“feeling hopeful about the future”) and 8 (“feeling happy”) are reversely scored before analysis.
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3 Higher scores corresponds to higher levels of depressive symptoms, and a score of 12 or higher
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5 has been used as the cut-off point for depressive symptoms ²¹.
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8 The CES-D short form has been validated among a subsample of 742 CHARLS
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10 participants aged 60 years and older, showing adequate psychometric properties ²¹.
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12 Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the two-factor model had the best fit. Depressive affect
13
14 and somatic retardation were loaded as the first factor, and positive affect was loaded as the
15
16 second factor. The two-factor structure varied across both genders in multi-group analysis ($\chi^2=$
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18 144.13, $p<0.001$). R^2 coefficient was used to measure the reliability of each item, and some of
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20 them differed between both gender groups. For example, depressive affect and somatic
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22 retardation accounted for 37% and 64% of the variance in the depression indicator (“bothered”)
23
24 for the males and females, respectively ²¹.
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28 **Measure of health conditions associated with depressive symptoms.** These factors
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30 included chronic conditions, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status.
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32 Information on chronic conditions was primarily based on self-reports except hypertension and
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34 diabetes. Participants were asked if they had been diagnosed with any of the following health
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36 conditions: arthritis, dyslipidemia, cancer (excluding minor skin cancers), liver diseases (except
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38 for fatty liver, tumors or cancer), cardiovascular diseases (heart attack, coronary heart disease,
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40 angina, congestive heart failure, or other heart problems), stroke, kidney disease (except for
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42 cancer or tumor), stomach or other gastrointestinal diseases (except for tumor or cancer),
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44 memory-related diseases, and asthma. Participants answered “yes” to these questions were
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46 defined as having these doctor-diagnosed conditions.
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51 Hypertension was defined based on the most current guidelines from the American Heart
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53 Association, which have lowered the threshold of hypertension cut-off points to 130/80 mmHg ²².
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3 A systolic blood pressure measurement of 130 mmHg and higher, or a diastolic measurement of
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5 80 mmHg and higher, or 130/80 mmHg and higher, or taking antihypertensive medications
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7 including modern western medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, or using other treatment for
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9 hypertension was considered as having hypertension²². Blood pressure was measured three
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11 times (approximately 45 seconds apart) for each participant on the left arm in sitting position,
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13 using an electronic blood pressure monitor (Omron™ HEM-7112)²³.
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17 The diagnosis of diabetes was based on the current guidelines from the American
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19 Diabetes Association (2018). Readings of 126 mg/dL or higher for fasting blood glucose \geq 126
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21 mg/dL, or readings of 200 mg/dL or higher for random blood glucose, or readings of 6.5% or
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23 higher for glycated hemoglobin, or use of insulin, or taking oral hypoglycemic medications
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25 including traditional Chinese medicine, modern western medicine, or other diabetes treatment
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27 was considered as having diabetes²⁴.
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31 Weight was measured to the nearest 0.1 kg using a digital scale (Omron™ HN-286,
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33 Yangzhou, China) on an even, uncarpeted surface, with participants removing heavy outer
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35 clothing. Height was measured without shoes to the nearest 0.1 cm using a stadiometer
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37 (Seca™213, Hangzhou, China). Body mass index (BMI, weight in kilograms divided by height
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39 in meters squared) was calculated from the participants' weight and height.
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43 Self-perceived health status is a powerful indicator of the health status of elderly people
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45²⁵. It was measured based on self-reports to the following question, “Would you rate health
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47 as...”, with five response options provided: excellent, very good, good, fair, and poor.
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50 Sleep duration in hours was collected using a question, “During the past month, how
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52 many hours of actual sleep did you get at night (average hours for one night)? (This may be
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54 shorter than the number of hours you spend in bed.)”
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3 **Covariates.** Factors that could confound the main association were identified a priori
4 from current literature. Covariates included age, gender³, education²⁶, and marital status^{3 27}.
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6 Consistent with a prior CHARLS publications^{28 29}, education was categorized as illiterate or no
7 formal education, some primary school but can read and write, primary school including home
8 schooling, and middle school or above. Marital status was grouped as married versus not married.
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14 **Ethical Considerations**

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17 The CHARLS was approved by the Peking University Ethical Review Committee. The
18 current study is a secondary analysis of the de-identified CHARLS public data. The Ethics
19 Review Committee granted the current study exemption from review.
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24 **Statistical Analysis**

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26 **Incidence of depressive symptoms.** The incidence of depressive symptoms was
27 analyzed taking into account the complex survey design and nonresponse rate in both estimates
28 and the corresponding standard errors (SEs). Participants were categorized into 5-year age
29 groups. SAS PROC SURVEYFREQ procedure was used to obtain the overall and gender
30 specific incidence of depressive symptoms among all participants and by the 5-year age groups.
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32 In addition, overall and gender-specific incidence of depressive symptoms was estimated by
33 rural and urban areas. We estimated the incidence of four outcomes of depressive symptoms:
34 having depressive symptoms in the first follow-up survey (2013-2014); having depressive
35 symptoms in the second follow-up survey (2015-2016); ever having depressive symptoms in the
36 first or the second follow-up survey; and consistently having depressive symptoms in both
37 follow-up surveys.
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51 **Prospective analysis.** Baseline characteristics of the participants were summarized as
52 frequency and percentage for categorical variables and mean and standard deviation or median
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3 and interquartile range for continuous variables. Associations of baseline health behaviors,
4 including chronic conditions, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status,
5 with the incidence of ever having depressive symptoms in 4 years of follow-up were evaluated
6 by a multivariate logistic regression model, while controlling for all covariates as mentioned
7 above. Odds ratios (ORs) and the corresponding 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were reported.
8 The SAS 9.4 (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, North Carolina) was used to perform the analyses. All the
9 p values were two-sided, and $p < 0.05$ was considered significant.

19 Results

21 Sample Characteristics

22 A total of 10,288 participants aged 45 years or older were included in the estimate of
23 depressive symptoms incidence. As shown in Table 1, the average age of all participants was
24 58.5 years and roughly half participants (49.3%) were women. Most of the participants (73.3%)
25 lived in rural areas and 60.6% participants had education of primary school or above. The
26 majority of participants (90.0%) were married or living with a partner at the time of data
27 collection. About a third of the participants (31.5%) were current smokers and 17.9% were
28 current regular drinkers. Participants had an average BMI of 23.7 kg/m². The mean duration of
29 sleep per night was 6.7 hours, and less than 20% of participants perceived their health as very
30 good or excellent. The mean CES-D short form score was 5.1 at baseline.

44 Incidence of Depressive Symptoms

45 As shown in Table 2 and in Figure 1, the incidence of ever having depressive symptoms
46 in 4 years was 22.3% (95% CI: 21.3%-23.3%). The incidence was much higher in rural areas
47 than that in urban areas (25.7% vs. 15.3%, $p < .0001$). Women had higher incidence of depressive
48 symptoms than men (27.9% vs. 16.7%, $p < .0001$). There is no clear pattern of the incidence of
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depressive symptoms over age groups (Figure 1). The incidence was highest among the 65-70 years of age group and lowest among the 45-50 years of age group.

Baseline Risk Factors and Incident Depressive Symptoms

As shown in Table 3, in the fully adjusted multivariable logistic regression model, sleeping duration and self-perceived health status were both inversely associated with the risk of depressive symptoms. Specifically, participants with an hour longer of sleeping had a 10% (95% CI: 7%-13%, $p < .0001$) lower risk of developing depressive symptoms in 4 years of follow up. Compared to individuals who perceived their health status as poor, those who perceived their health status as fair, good, very good, and excellent had 42% (95% CI: 39%-52%), 47% (95% CI: 36%-57%), 64% (95% CI: 54%-72%), and 62% (95% CI: 43%-74%) lower risk of developing depressive symptoms, respectively. In addition, three chronic conditions, diabetes (OR=1.19, 95% CI: 1.00-1.42, $p = .04$), chronic kidney disease (OR=1.32, 95% CI: 1.04-1.67, $p = .02$), chronic digestive disorders (OR=1.15, 95% CI: 1.01-1.31, $p = .04$), and arthritis (OR=1.43, 95% CI: 1.28-1.61, $p < .0001$) were associated with higher risk of depressive symptoms. However, baseline BMI was not associated with the onset of depressive symptoms in this population (OR=0.99, 95% CI: 0.97-1.01). Chronic lung disease ($p = .001$), chronic liver disease ($p = .004$), and asthma ($p = .02$) were positively associated with incidence of depressive disorder in the raw analysis, but became non-significant in the fully adjusted model (all $p > .05$).

Discussion

Through analysis to data of a nationally representative sample of mid-aged and older Chinese adults, we found that the incidence of depressive symptoms in a 4-year follow-up was as high as 22.3%. Large disparities in the incidence of depressive symptoms were observed between rural and urban areas and between men and women. Furthermore, longer sleeping

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3 duration and better self-perceived health status were both associated with lower risk of
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5 depressive symptoms. In addition, diabetes and chronic kidney disease at baseline increased the
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7 risk of depressive symptoms. However, baseline BMI was not associated with depressive
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9 symptoms in this population.
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12 Our study found that in 4 years of follow-up, as high as 22.3% of the mid-aged and older
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14 Chinese adults developed depressive symptoms. Using the same database, a recent study
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16 reported that the prevalence of depressive symptoms at CHARLS baseline survey was up to 26.2%
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18 ¹³. Collectively, these findings revealed that depressive symptoms were a major public health
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20 challenge in China, and intervention programs should be developed to reduce the burden of
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22 depressive symptoms. Furthermore, large disparities were also observed between rural and urban
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24 residents and between men and women. In particular, women and residents living in rural areas
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26 were at a higher risk of developing depressive symptoms. The high incidence rate is not only
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28 relevant to middle-aged and older Chinese adults, it also has implications for younger
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30 generations of the Chinese. Many depressive symptoms cases remained undiagnosed, and even
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32 among those who were aware of the condition, very few sought treatments due to cultural stigma
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34 ^{9 10}. Middle-aged and elderly grandparents are the primary caregivers of infants, toddlers, and
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36 young children in rural China. Depressed caregivers were more likely to show negative parenting
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38 interactions (e.g., limited facial and behavioral affect) with their children, and these interactions
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40 were directly relevant for children's development ^{30 31}. A strong negative correlation has been
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42 reported between the levels of depression of grandmothers and the levels of developmental
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44 outcomes of the grandchildren in their care, including cognitive, language, social-emotional, and
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46 motor functions ^{32 33}. Taken together, changes in social policies and intervention programs
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3 should be developed to address timely diagnosis and treatment of depression for these people,
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5 which will help improve young children's developmental outcomes in rural China.
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8 Individuals with longer sleep duration had lower risk of depressive symptoms. This
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10 finding is in line with previous studies^{34 35}. Sleep disorders are often the presenting and core
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12 symptoms of depression³⁶. However, treatment of depression did not resolve sleep symptoms,
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14 which may confer a greater risk for depression recurrence and relapse³⁶. Therefore, sleep
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16 deprivation should be at least considered as an early indicator of depressive symptoms.
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19 Individuals with sleep deprivation should be aware of their high risk of depressive symptoms and
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21 manage to improve the length of their sleeping.
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24 Better self-perceived health status also reduced the risk of depressive symptoms in the
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26 current study. The finding is consistent with studies among other populations^{37 38}. Self-perceived
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28 health is a powerful indicator of the overall health status of elderly people²⁵. Many factors,
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30 including sociodemographic characteristics, chronic disease, functional status, social
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32 relationships, neighborhood environment, and nutrition pattern, were all important determinants
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34 of self-perceived health²⁵. These factors are also associated with depressive symptoms. The
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36 current study adjusted most of the factors, except for functional status, social relationship, and
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38 nutrition pattern, which were not available in the CHARLS database. However, poorer self-
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40 perceived health status was still significantly associated with higher risk of depressive symptoms.
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42 Future studies additionally controlling for those factors will help to evaluate the contribution of
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44 those factors on the associations of self-perceived health status with depressive symptoms.
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46 Furthermore, such study may also help delineate whether self-perceived health status may
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48 represent other factors that may lead to depressive symptoms. Finally, individuals with
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50 depressive disorders were more likely to report poor self-perceived health^{39 40}. Therefore, there
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3 might be a bidirectional association between depressive symptoms and self-perceived health.
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5 Future studies examining the bi-directional relationship are warranted.
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8 Among 12 chronic conditions, baseline chronic kidney disease increased the risk of
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10 depressive symptoms at follow-up. Although the underlying mechanisms have not been well
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12 understood, some authors suggested that the psychosocial and biologic changes in dialysis may
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14 explain this relationship⁴¹. In addition to chronic kidney disease, baseline diabetes also
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16 conferred a higher risk of symptoms of depression over time in this study. Similar results were
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18 reported in a meta-analysis of 11 studies, which found that people with diabetes at baseline had a
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20 24% higher risk of developing depression at follow-up compared to those without diabetes⁴². In
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22 addition, high prevalence of depression among people with diabetes and/or chronic kidney
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24 disease has also been observed in cross-sectional studies⁴³⁻⁴⁵. In concordance with these findings,
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26 this study added further evidence that compared to other chronic conditions at baseline, baseline
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28 chronic disease and diabetes were more likely to be associated with depressive symptoms over
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30 time in a population of mid-aged and older Chinese population.
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35 Overweight/obesity is well established to interfere with mental health, with depressive
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37 symptoms being more common among overweight/obese individuals than their normal-weight
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39 counterparts, especially in overweight/obese women^{46,47}. A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies
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41 further confirmed this relationship, in which excess weight at baseline increased a higher risk for
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43 incident depression at follow-up⁴⁸. In contrast to these findings from Western and European
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45 countries, using data from a prospective survey of a large, representative sample of mid-aged and
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47 elderly community-dwelling residents in Mainland China, we did not find a relationship between
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49 baseline BMI and subsequent depressive symptoms over time. These inconsistent findings may
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51 suggest that because participants in the current study were predominantly low in BMI at baseline
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3 (mean BMI was 23.7 kg/m²), their likelihood of experiencing depressive symptoms may have
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5 been lower compared to those participants reported in Luppino et al⁴⁸. However, these are
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7 preliminary findings that need to be further investigated in future prospective studies in this
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9 population.
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12 The study has several important strengths. First, to the best of our knowledge, this is the
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14 first study that examined the incidence of depressive symptoms in a nationally representative
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16 population in China. Previous studies have focused on the estimation of depressive symptoms
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18 prevalence^{49 50} or investigated the incidence of depressive symptoms in a regional sample⁵¹.
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20 Second, since the sample was representative of community-dwelling mid-aged and older Chinese
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22 adults, the results can be generalized to mid-aged and older Chinese adults. Third, a Chinese
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24 specific cut-off point of the CES-D short form score for depressive symptoms has been used, and
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26 the cut-off point was validated among middle-aged and older Chinese adults²¹. Therefore, our
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28 study provided more reliable estimate of the incidence of depressive symptoms. Finally, strict
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30 quality control measures, including GPS matching, data checking, recording and checking
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32 interviews, and calling back participants, were implemented at each stage of the study to ensure
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34 data quality and reliability.
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41 There were also some limitations in this study that should be acknowledged. First,
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43 depressive symptoms were based on self-reports instead of clinically diagnosis. Therefore,
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45 information bias may be present. However, with longitudinal design, information bias in the
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47 current study was very likely to be non-differential. Since non-differential misclassification
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49 generally bias the association estimates towards the null, our study findings were more robust.
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51 Second, nighttime sleep duration was also measured based on self-reports. The use of self-
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53 reported measures in the CHARLS surveys may have biased study results, since participants may
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3 consistently under- or overestimate their nighttime sleep duration ⁵². Objective or direct
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5 measures of sleep duration should be used to increase precision and accuracy of self-report
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7 assessment. Finally, this study was a prospective analysis of baseline risk factors with depressive
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9 symptoms at follow-up, and no causal associations between these predictors and depressive
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11 symptoms can be drawn from the analysis.
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15 The findings of the current study have important implications for clinical practice. Health
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17 care professionals are especially encouraged to address the needs for better mental health in
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19 elderly population ⁵³. In view of the high incidence of depressive symptoms (22.3%) among mid-
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21 aged and elderly Chinese, the findings of this study highlight the importance of developing an
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23 appropriate screening test to identify depressive symptoms for those who are vulnerable and
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25 ensure these individuals can receive early interventions for depressive symptoms. The screening
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27 test should include items such as areas of living (rural or urban areas), gender, age groups,
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29 nighttime sleep duration, self-perceived health status, and certain chronic conditions, especially
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31 chronic kidney disease and diabetes. In addition, intervention strategies that address short
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33 nighttime sleep duration may be used to alleviate depressive symptoms and improve mental
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35 health in this population. Intervention programs should also be prioritized to target at specific
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37 populations, such as women and residents living in rural areas, as these populations were at a
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39 higher risk of developing depressive symptoms. Finally, new patients with chronic kidney
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41 disease and diabetes should be screened for depression using the CES-D short form at initial visit.
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47 Persons with depressive symptoms (a score of 12 or higher) should then be assessed by a
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49 clinician using the structured clinical interview for Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental
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51 Disorders, Fifth Edition. Potential participants with serious depressive symptoms should be
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53 referred immediately to a mental health professional. Individuals with these two conditions are
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3 particularly vulnerable to the deleterious effects of affective symptoms, since symptoms of
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5 depression is a known risk factor for noncompliance with medical treatment and adverse health
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7 outcomes^{54 55}.
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10 **Conclusions**

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12 To conclude, our study found a high incidence of depressive symptoms in 4 years of
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14 follow-up among a nationally representative mid-aged and older Chinese population. In addition,
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16 great disparities in the incidence of depressive symptoms were observed between individuals
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18 lived in rural and urban areas and between men and women. Furthermore, we identified that
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20 worse self-perceived health, shorter duration of sleeping, diabetes and chronic kidney disease at
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22 baseline increased the risk for depressive symptoms. These findings supported the importance of
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24 baseline status to longitudinal changes in depressive symptoms. Thus, interventions for
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26 vulnerable mid-aged and older adults should focus on addressing short nighttime sleep duration.
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28 These findings also help identify individuals at higher risk for depressive symptoms, such as
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30 those with chronic kidney disease and diabetes, or women and residents living in rural areas, so
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32 that early interventions can be implemented to prevent depressive symptoms.
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37 **Figure Legend**

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40 Figure 1. The Incidence of Depressive Symptoms in 4 Years of Follow-up among
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42 Participants of the CHARLS
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Contributorship Statement

All authors contribute to the conception and design of this study. YW, YY, and DW were responsible for the design, analysis, drafting and revision of this manuscript. CL and JL were responsible for interpretation of data and preparation of the manuscript.

Competing Interests Statement

None declared.

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Patient Consent for Publication

Not required.

Data Sharing Statement

The study used a public data from the CHARLS that were obtained from the CHARLS home page at <http://charls.pku.edu.cn/en>.

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Tables

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of the CHARLS participants free of depressive symptoms

Variable	Distribution
N	10,288
age, years, mean (SD)	58.5 (9.8)
Male, n (%)	5845 (50.7%)
Living in rural areas, n (%)	8,440 (73.3%)
Education, n (%)	
<i>No formal education or illiterate</i>	2,736 (23.7%)
<i>Some primary school</i>	1,804 (15.7%)
<i>Finished primary school</i>	2,590 (22.5%)
<i>Junior high school or above</i>	4,394 (38.1%)
Currently married, n (%)	10,375 (90.0%)
Smoking status, n (%)	
<i>Current smoker</i>	3,629 (31.5%)
<i>Former smoker</i>	1,034 (9.0%)
<i>Never smoking</i>	6,868 (60.0%)
Drinking status, n (%)	
<i>Regular drinkers</i>	1,951 (17.9%)
<i>Occasional drinkers</i>	476 (4.4%)
<i>Former drinkers</i>	646 (5.9%)
<i>Never drinking</i>	7,833 (71.8%)
Weight, kg, mean (SD)	60 (11.8)
Height, m, mean (SD)	1.6 (0.1)
Body mass index, kg/m ² , mean (SD)	23.7 (4)
Sleeping duration, hours, mean (SD)	6.7 (1.7)
CES-D short form score	5.1 (3.3)
Self-perceived health status, n (%)	
<i>Excellent</i>	483 (4.2%)
<i>Very good</i>	1,744 (15.1%)
<i>Good</i>	4,136 (35.9%)
<i>Fair</i>	3,977 (34.5%)
<i>Poor</i>	1,187 (10.3%)
Chronic conditions, n (%)	
<i>Hypertension</i>	4,045 (40.3%)
<i>Dyslipidemia</i>	1,016 (9.0%)
<i>Diabetes</i>	1,210 (15.0%)
<i>Cancer</i>	97 (0.8%)
<i>Liver disease</i>	387 (3.4%)
<i>Heart disease</i>	1,162 (10.1%)
<i>Stroke</i>	188 (1.6%)
<i>Kidney disease</i>	563 (4.9%)

<i>Gastrointestinal disease</i>	2,180 (18.9%)
<i>Dementia</i>	105 (0.9%)
<i>Arthritis</i>	3,221 (28.0%)
<i>Asthma</i>	312 (2.7%)

Note. CES-D=Center for Epidemiologic Study of Depression short form; SD=standard deviation.

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Table 2. Incidence of depressive symptoms among the CHARLS participants

	Ever having depressive Symptoms	Depressive symptoms in both visits 2 & 3	Depressive symptoms in 2 years	Depressive symptoms in 4 years
Overall	22.3 (21.3-23.3)	4.4 (4.0-4.9)	13.2 (12.5-14.1)	16.8 (15.9-17.7)
Rural	25.7 (24.6-26.8)	5.3 (4.8-5.8)	15.3 (14.3-16.2)	18.8 (17.8-19.8)
Urban	15.3 (13.4-17.2)	2.6 (1.9-3.3)	9.0 (7.4-10.6)	12.2 (10.4-14.1)
Men	16.7 (15.5-17.9)	3.0 (2.5-3.5)	9.9 (9.0-10.9)	12.2 (11.1-13.2)
Women	27.9 (26.4-29.4)	5.8 (5.1-6.6)	16.6 (15.3-17.9)	21.5 (20.1-22.9)

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Table 3. Raw and multi-variables adjusted associations with the incidence of depressive symptoms in 4 years of follow-up.

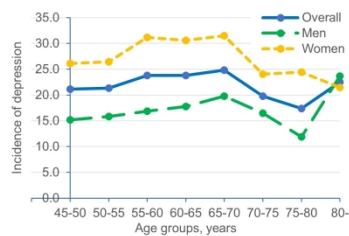
Variables	Multi-Variate Adjusted		Raw Association	
	OR (95% CI)	P	OR (95% CI)	P
Age, per year older	0.99 (0.98-0.99)	0.001	0.99 (0.99-1.00)	0.59
Male vs. Female	0.60 (0.51-0.71)	<.0001	0.51 (0.46-0.56)	<.0001
Education level				
<i>No formal education or illiterate</i>	ref.	<.0001	ref.	<.0001
<i>Some primary school</i>	1.06 (0.90-1.25)		0.93 (0.80-1.08)	
<i>Finished primary school</i>	0.83 (0.71-0.97)		0.67 (0.57-0.77)	
<i>Junior high school or above</i>	0.71 (0.61-0.84)		0.48 (0.42-0.55)	
Rural vs. Urban	1.61 (1.38-1.88)	<.0001	1.72 (1.50-1.96)	<.0001
Not married vs Married	1.25 (1.04-1.51)	0.02	1.28 (1.08-1.51)	0.004
Smoking status				
<i>Non-smokers</i>	ref.		ref.	
<i>Current smokers</i>	1.02 (0.86-1.20)	0.03	0.51 (0.41-0.62)	<.0001
<i>Former smokers</i>	0.75 (0.59-0.96)		0.68 (0.60-0.76)	
Drinking status				
<i>Never drinkers</i>	Ref.		ref.	
<i>Former drinkers</i>	1.02 (0.80-1.30)	0.15	0.84 (0.67-1.04)	<.0001
<i>Occasional drinkers</i>	0.79 (0.59-1.06)		0.59 (0.45-0.78)	
<i>Regular drinkers</i>	0.85 (0.71-1.01)		0.59 (0.51-0.68)	
Body mass index, per 1 kg/m ² increase	0.99 (0.98-1.01)	0.20	0.99 (0.98-1.00)	0.14
Self-perceived health status				
<i>Excellent</i>	0.36 (0.25-0.52)	<.0001	0.28 (0.20-0.39)	<.0001
<i>Very good</i>	0.36 (0.29-0.45)		0.28 (0.23-0.35)	
<i>Good</i>	0.53 (0.44-0.63)		0.45 (0.38-0.53)	
<i>Fair</i>	0.61 (0.52-0.73)		0.56 (0.48-0.66)	
<i>Poor</i>	ref.		ref.	
Sleep duration, per hour longer	0.89 (0.87-0.92)	<.0001	0.88 (0.85-0.90)	<.0001
Hypertension (Y vs. N)	1.07 (0.95-1.21)	0.25	1.07 (0.96-1.18)	0.22
Dyslipidemia (Y vs. N)	0.85 (0.69-1.04)	0.12	0.91 (0.76-1.09)	0.29
Diabetes (Y vs. N)	1.19 (1.00-1.42)	0.04	1.11 (0.95-2.30)	0.19
Cancer (Y vs. N)	0.92 (0.48-1.77)	0.80	1.17 (0.65-2.12)	0.61
Chronic Lung Disease (Y vs. N)	1.18 (0.97-1.44)	0.10	1.33 (1.12-1.58)	0.001
Chronic Liver Disease (Y vs. N)	0.90 (0.67-1.22)	0.51	1.04 (0.79-1.37)	0.81
Heart Disease (Y vs. N)	1.06 (0.88-1.28)	0.54	1.27 (1.08-1.49)	0.004
Stroke (Y vs. N)	0.88 (0.56-1.39)	0.59	1.12 (0.75-1.66)	0.58
Chronic Kidney Disease (Y vs. N)	1.32 (1.04-1.67)	0.02	1.45 (1.16-1.80)	0.001
Chronic Digestive Disorders (Y vs. N)	1.15 (1.01-1.31)	0.04	1.43 (1.26-1.61)	<.0001
Psychological Disorders (Y vs. N)	1.00 (0.53-1.89)	0.99	1.44 (0.81-2.56)	0.22
Dementia (Y vs. N)	1.31 (0.72-2.38)	0.37	1.15 (0.67-1.97)	0.62
Arthritis (Y vs. N)	1.43 (1.28-1.61)	<.0001	1.72 (1.54-1.91)	<.0001
Asthma (Y vs. N)	1.25 (0.90-1.75)	0.19	1.43 (1.06-1.91)	0.02

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Note. CI=confidence interval; OR=odds ratio

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STROBE 2007 (v4) Statement—Checklist of items that should be included in reports of *cohort studies*

Section/Topic	Item #	Recommendation	Reported on page #
Title and abstract	1	(a) Indicate the study's design with a commonly used term in the title or the abstract	3
		(b) Provide in the abstract an informative and balanced summary of what was done and what was found	3
Introduction			
Background/rationale	2	Explain the scientific background and rationale for the investigation being reported	6-7
Objectives	3	State specific objectives, including any prespecified hypotheses	7
Methods			
Study design	4	Present key elements of study design early in the paper	8
Setting	5	Describe the setting, locations, and relevant dates, including periods of recruitment, exposure, follow-up, and data collection	8-9
Participants	6	(a) Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of selection of participants. Describe methods of follow-up	8
		(b) For matched studies, give matching criteria and number of exposed and unexposed	NA
Variables	7	Clearly define all outcomes, exposures, predictors, potential confounders, and effect modifiers. Give diagnostic criteria, if applicable	9-11
Data sources/ measurement	8*	For each variable of interest, give sources of data and details of methods of assessment (measurement). Describe comparability of assessment methods if there is more than one group	9
Bias	9	Describe any efforts to address potential sources of bias	17
Study size	10	Explain how the study size was arrived at	8
Quantitative variables	11	Explain how quantitative variables were handled in the analyses. If applicable, describe which groupings were chosen and why	12
Statistical methods	12	(a) Describe all statistical methods, including those used to control for confounding	12
		(b) Describe any methods used to examine subgroups and interactions	NA
		(c) Explain how missing data were addressed	NA
		(d) If applicable, explain how loss to follow-up was addressed	NA
		(e) Describe any sensitivity analyses	NA
Results			

Participants	13*	(a) Report numbers of individuals at each stage of study—eg numbers potentially eligible, examined for eligibility, confirmed eligible, included in the study, completing follow-up, and analysed	8
		(b) Give reasons for non-participation at each stage	NA
		(c) Consider use of a flow diagram	NA
Descriptive data	14*	(a) Give characteristics of study participants (eg demographic, clinical, social) and information on exposures and potential confounders	13
		(b) Indicate number of participants with missing data for each variable of interest	NA
		(c) Summarise follow-up time (eg, average and total amount)	8
Outcome data	15*	Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures over time	NA
Main results	16	(a) Give unadjusted estimates and, if applicable, confounder-adjusted estimates and their precision (eg, 95% confidence interval). Make clear which confounders were adjusted for and why they were included	11, 13-14
		(b) Report category boundaries when continuous variables were categorized	NA
		(c) If relevant, consider translating estimates of relative risk into absolute risk for a meaningful time period	NA
Other analyses	17	Report other analyses done—eg analyses of subgroups and interactions, and sensitivity analyses	NA
Discussion			
Key results	18	Summarise key results with reference to study objectives	14
Limitations			
Interpretation	20	Give a cautious overall interpretation of results considering objectives, limitations, multiplicity of analyses, results from similar studies, and other relevant evidence	17
Generalisability	21	Discuss the generalisability (external validity) of the study results	17
Other information			
Funding	22	Give the source of funding and the role of the funders for the present study and, if applicable, for the original study on which the present article is based	20

*Give information separately for cases and controls in case-control studies and, if applicable, for exposed and unexposed groups in cohort and cross-sectional studies.

Note: An Explanation and Elaboration article discusses each checklist item and gives methodological background and published examples of transparent reporting. The STROBE checklist is best used in conjunction with this article (freely available on the Web sites of PLoS Medicine at <http://www.plosmedicine.org/>, Annals of Internal Medicine at <http://www.annals.org/>, and Epidemiology at <http://www.epidem.com/>). Information on the STROBE Initiative is available at www.strobe-statement.org.

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Incidence and risk factors of depressive symptoms in four years of follow-up among mid-aged and elderly community-dwelling Chinese adults: Findings from the China health and Retirement Longitudinal Study

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Keywords:	depressive symptoms, incidence, mid-aged and older adults, China

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3 **Incidence and risk factors of depressive symptoms in four years of follow-up among mid-**
4 **aged and elderly community-dwelling Chinese adults: Findings from the China Health and**
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7 **Retirement Longitudinal Study**
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10 Yue Wen, Chunjuan Liu, Jing Liao, Yiqiong Yin*, Dongmei Wu*

11
12 Correspondence should be made to:

13
14 Dongmei Wu, PhD, RN

15
16 Department of Nursing, The Clinical Hospital of Chengdu Brain Science Institute, MOE Key

17
18 Lab for Neuroinformation, University of Electronic Science and Technology of China

19
20 Huli West 1st Lane, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, 610036.

21
22 Tel: 86-28-69515754

23
24 E-mail: wudongmei_2001@163.com

25
26 Yiqiong Yin, BN, RN

27
28 Chief Superintendent Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital,

29
30 Sichuan University

31
32 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China, 610041.

33
34 Tel: 86-28-85422877

35
36 E-mail: yiqiong489@163.com

37
38 *: Yiqiong Yin and Dongmei Wu were co-corresponding authors for this manuscript.

39
40 The full names, institutions, city, and country of all other co-authors:

41
42 Yue Wen, BN, RN

43
44 Supervisor Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan

45
46 University

47
48 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: wenyue19820327@163.com

1
2
3 Chunjuan Liu, BN, RN
4

5 Supervisor Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan
6
7 University
8

9
10 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: liuchunjuan2002@163.com
11

12 Jing Liao, MSN, RN
13

14 Senior Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital, Sichuan University
15

16 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: m15982277765@163.com
17

18 Yiqiong Yin, BN, RN
19

20 Chief Superintendent Nurse, Department of Gastrointestinal Surgery, West China Hospital,
21
22 Sichuan University
23

24 37 Guoxue Xiang Street, Chengdu, China, 610041. E-mail: yiqiong489@163.com
25

26 Dongmei Wu, PhD, RN
27

28 Assistant Professor, Department of Nursing, The Clinical Hospital of Chengdu Brain Science
29

30 Institute, MOE Key Lab for Neuroinformation, University of Electronic Science and Technology
31
32 of China
33

34 Huli West 1st Lane, Chengdu, China, 610036. Tel: 86-28-69515754. E-mail:
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39 wudongmei_2001@163.com
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Abstract

Objectives. The purpose of this study was to examine the incidence of depressive symptoms, and determine if baseline risk factors conferred a risk for incident depressive symptoms in nationally representative sample of mid-aged and elderly Chinese adults.

Design. This study was a secondary analysis of a prospective cohort from a nationally representative sample.

Setting. Community samples were recruited from the baseline survey of the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study. A four-stage, stratified, cluster probability sampling strategy was used, which included 10,257 households with members aged 45 years or older and their spouse.

Participants. A total of 11,533 participants free of depressive symptoms at baseline were identified, and 10,288 were re-examined in either the first and/or the second follow-up surveys. The current analysis was conducted among the 10,288 participants.

Primary and secondary outcome measures. Depressive symptoms were measured by the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale short form.

Results. The findings showed that the incidence of depressive symptoms in a 4-year follow-up was as high as 22.3%. The incidence was much higher in rural areas (25.7%) and in women (27.9%). Furthermore, participants with one-hour longer of nighttime sleep had a 10% lower risk of developing depressive symptoms. Compared to individuals who perceived their health status as poor, those who perceived their health status as excellent had a 62% lower risk of developing depressive symptoms. In addition, having diabetes (OR=1.19), chronic kidney disease (OR=1.32), chronic digestive disorders (OR=1.15), and arthritis (OR=1.43) at baseline increased the risk of depressive symptoms. However, baseline body mass index was not associated with the subsequent depressive symptoms in this population.

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3 **Conclusions.** This study highlights the importance of developing an appropriate screening test to
4 identify depressive symptoms for those who are vulnerable and ensure these individuals can
5 receive early interventions for depressive symptoms.
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10 **Key words:** depressive symptoms, incidence, mid-aged and older adults, China
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Strengths and limitations of this study

- Since the sample was representative of community-dwelling mid-aged and older Chinese adults, the study results can be generalized to mid-aged and older Chinese adults.
- Depressive symptoms were based on self-reports instead of clinical diagnosis. Therefore, information bias may be present. However, with a longitudinal design, information bias in the current study was likely to be non-differential.
- This study was a prospective analysis of baseline risk factors of depressive symptoms at follow-up, and no causal associations between these predictors and depressive symptoms can be drawn from the analysis.

Introduction

Depression has been recognized as a leading cause of disability and a major contributor to disease burdens globally¹. An estimated 322 million adults had depression in 2015 worldwide, with nearly half of these people living in the South-East Asia and Western Pacific regions². In China, about 4.2% adults was estimated to be depressed, and the prevalence of depression reached a peak in older adulthood². With fast economic growth, mid-aged adults are exposed to a high-stress lifestyle, which is thought to contribute significantly to an increase in mental health disorders in susceptible people¹. Older adults, on the other hand, face noteworthy challenges to their life, including loss of independence, loss of social support due to the death of a spouse or weakened family connectedness (traditionally referred to as ‘filial piety’), financial difficulties, and medical vulnerability³. Late-life depressive symptoms increase risk for significant impairment in social function³, dementia⁴, declined quality of life⁵, and suicide⁶. They further complicate the prognosis of concurrent medical problems by increasing physical disability and decreasing motivation and adherence to prescribed medications and/or exercise or rehabilitation programs^{7,8}.

Although depression has come to be regarded as the common cold of psychosocial functioning in Western culture, mental disorders are still viewed as degrading not only to the patient, but also to the entire family in Chinese culture^{9,10}. In addition, although effective interventions have been developed to alleviate symptoms of depression, depressive symptoms are often overlooked among the elderly, since most of them mistakenly consider these symptoms to be part of the normal aging process¹¹. Therefore, older adults may not actively seek medical treatment and leave their depressive symptoms undiagnosed or untreated. As persons aged 45 or older will increase from 32% to 51% of the total population from 2010 to 2040 in China¹²,

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3 reliable and up-to-date estimates of the proportion of this population affected by depressive
4 symptoms are a key ingredient of effective health policy, planning, and evaluations.
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8 Recently, a number of population-based studies have estimated the prevalence of
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10 depressive symptoms among mid-aged and older Chinese adults ^{3 11 13 14}. Given that all these
11 studies were cross-sectional, the incidence of depressive symptoms among mid-aged and older
12 Chinese adults was not clear. Furthermore, despite a myriad of studies that examined a number
13 of health conditions associated with an increased risk of mid- and late-life depressive symptoms,
14 including chronic diseases, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status ³
15 ¹⁴⁻¹⁷, the prospective relationships between these health conditions and depressive symptoms
16 have not been well understood in this population. Such prospective relationships may provide
17 further evidence on how baseline conditions may be predictive of depressive symptoms in the
18 follow-up periods than cross-sectional analysis, especially given that these health conditions are
19 expected to be a great challenge to an increasing aging population, and can often co-occur with
20 depressive symptoms which may make these conditions even worse ³. A better understanding of
21 these associations may also provide information that is useful in identifying patients who are
22 vulnerable to mid-life or late-life depressive symptoms, and proactively assessing and treating
23 modifiable risk factors during primary health care service.
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42 Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the incidence of depressive
43 symptoms among mid-aged and older adults in China, and determine if baseline sleep duration,
44 body weight, self-perceived health status, and chronic conditions conferred a risk for incident
45 depressive symptoms over time, using baseline and four years of follow-up data from the China
46 Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS).
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53 **Methods**

Study Design

This study was a secondary analysis of prospective data from the CHARLS. The CHARLS is a nationwide, community-engaged, population-based epidemiological study of Chinese adults aged 45 years or older. The purpose of the CHARLS was to obtain detailed information regarding the dynamics of retirement and how it interacts with health, health insurance, and economic well-being. The CHARLS collects detailed information on a wide range of domains, including demographics, health status, physical measures, employment history, pension insurance, retirement, income, expenditures and assets¹⁸. The current study used data from baseline, the first, and the second follow-up surveys.

Participants

The CHARLS national baseline survey was conducted in 28 provinces (Tibet, Ningxia, and Hainan were not included) across the country from May 2011 to March 2012. It was a survey of 10,257 households with members aged 45 years or older and their spouse, for a total of about 17,708 individuals. A four-stage, stratified, cluster probability sampling strategy was used to select eligible participants¹⁸. Details of the sampling procedures have been published elsewhere¹⁹. In brief, in the first stage, all counties were grouped by gross domestic product and by urban or rural regions. In the second stage, counties were stratified and sampled using probabilities proportional to size (PPS). Three rural villages and urban neighborhoods were randomly selected as primary sampling units (PSUs) using PPS in each county. In the third stage, all buildings in each PSU were recognized on satellite imagery of the Google Earth. A sample of 24 households was randomly selected among all households in each PSU. In the final stage, a short screening form was employed to ensure study eligibility in selected households and

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3 members of 45 years of age or above were invited to enroll into the study. The response rate for
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5 the survey was over 80% (94% in rural areas and 69% in urban areas) ¹⁸.
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8 The baseline cohort of the CHARLS participants was followed up every two years with
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10 the same survey questionnaires and biomedical measures ¹⁸. The first follow-up survey of the
11
12 CHARLS was fielded between July 2013 and January 2014. Subjects in this study used the same
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14 inclusion and exclusion criteria as the original study. A total of 11,533 participants free of
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16 depressive symptoms at baseline was identified, of whom 9,329 participated in the first follow-
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18 up survey in 2013-2014, 9,157 were examined in the second follow-up survey in 2015-2016, and
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20 10,288 were followed in either the first or the second follow-up surveys. The current analysis
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22 was conducted among the 10,288 participants.
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25 26 **Patient and Public Involvement**

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28 In the current study, we used de-identified data from the CHARLS with no direct
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30 involvement of or interaction with participants in the design, recruitment or conduct of the
31
32 original cohort study.
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35 36 **Variables, Definitions, and Measures**

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38 **Depressive symptoms.** The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-
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40 D) short form was used to measure depressive symptoms ²⁰. The CES-D short form consists of
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42 ten items, and each item is rated on a four-point Likert scale with answers ranging from 0 (rarely
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44 or none of the time) to 3 (most or all of the time) and the total possible summary score of 0 to 30.
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46 The time frame for the CES-D short form refers to the week prior to the interview. Item 5
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48 (“feeling hopeful about the future”) and 8 (“feeling happy”) are reversely scored before analysis.
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50 Higher scores corresponds to higher levels of depressive symptoms, and a score of 12 or higher
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52 has been used as the cut-off point for depressive symptoms ²¹.
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3 The CES-D short form has been validated among a subsample of 742 CHARLS
4 participants aged 60 years and older, demonstrating adequate psychometric properties ²¹. Two
5 factors were identified by confirmatory factor analysis. Somatic retardation and depressive affect
6 were identified as the first factor, and positive affect was identified as the second factor. The
7 two-factor structure varied across both genders in multi-group analysis ($\chi^2= 144.13$, $p<0.001$). R^2
8 coefficient was used to measure the reliability of each item, with some of items differing
9 between men and women. For example, depressive affect and somatic retardation explained 37%
10 and 64% of the variance in the depression indicator (“bothered”) for men and women,
11 respectively ²¹.
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24 **Measure of health conditions associated with depressive symptoms.** These factors
25 included chronic conditions, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status.
26 Information on chronic conditions was primarily based on self-reports except hypertension and
27 diabetes. Participants were asked if they had been diagnosed with any of the following health
28 conditions: arthritis, dyslipidemia, cancer (excluding minor skin cancers), liver diseases (except
29 for fatty liver, tumors or cancer), cardiovascular diseases (heart attack, coronary heart disease,
30 angina, congestive heart failure, or other heart problems), stroke, kidney disease (except for
31 cancer or tumor), stomach or other gastrointestinal diseases (except for tumor or cancer),
32 memory-related diseases, and asthma. Participants answered “yes” to these questions were
33 defined as having these conditions.
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47 Hypertension was defined based on the most current guidelines from the American Heart
48 Association, which have lowered the threshold of hypertension cut-off points to 130/80 mmHg ²².
49 A systolic blood pressure measurement of 130 mmHg and higher, or a diastolic measurement of
50 80 mmHg and higher, or 130/80 mmHg and higher, or taking antihypertensive medications
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3 including modern western medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, or using other treatment
4 options for hypertension was considered as having hypertension²². Blood pressure was measured
5 three times (approximately 45 seconds apart) for each participant on the left arm in a sitting
6 position, using an electronic blood pressure monitor (Omron™ HEM-7112)²³.
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12 The diagnosis of diabetes was based on the current guidelines from the American
13 Diabetes Association²⁴. A reading of 126 mg/dL or higher for fasting blood glucose, or a reading
14 of 200 mg/dL or higher for random blood glucose, or a reading of 6.5% or higher for glycated
15 hemoglobin, or use of insulin, or taking oral hypoglycemic medications including traditional
16 Chinese medicine, modern western medicine, or other diabetes treatment was considered as
17 having diabetes²⁴.
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26 Weight was measured to the nearest 0.1 kg using a digital scale (Omron™ HN-286,
27 Yangzhou, China) on an even, uncarpeted surface, with participants removing heavy outer
28 clothing. Height was measured without shoes to the nearest 0.1 cm using a stadiometer
29 (Seca™213, Hangzhou, China). Body mass index (BMI, weight in kilograms divided by height
30 in meters squared) was calculated from the participants' weight and height.
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38 Self-perceived health status was measured based on self-reports to the following question,
39 “Would you rate health as...”, with five response options provided: excellent, very good, good,
40 fair, and poor.
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45 Nighttime sleep duration in hours was collected using a question, “During the past month,
46 how many hours of actual sleep did you get at night (average hours for one night)? (This may be
47 shorter than the number of hours you spend in bed.)”
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51 **Covariates.** Factors that could confound the main association were identified a priori
52 from current literature. Covariates included age, gender³, education²⁵, and marital status^{3 26}.
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3 Consistent with a prior CHARLS publications^{27 28}, education was categorized as illiterate or no
4 formal education, some primary school but can read and write, primary school including home
5 schooling, and middle school or above. Marital status was grouped as married versus not married.
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8 9 10 **Ethical Considerations**

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12 The CHARLS was approved by the Peking University Ethical Review Committee. The
13 current study is a secondary analysis of the de-identified CHARLS public data. The Ethics
14 Review Committee granted an exempt research determination to the current study.
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18 19 **Statistical Analysis**

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21 **Incidence of depressive symptoms.** The incidence of depressive symptoms was
22 analyzed taking into account the complex survey design and nonresponse rate in both estimates
23 and the corresponding standard errors. Participants were categorized into 5-year age groups. SAS
24 PROC SURVEYFREQ procedure was used to obtain overall and gender-specific incidence of
25 depressive symptoms among all participants and by the 5-year age groups. In addition, overall
26 and gender-specific incidence of depressive symptoms was estimated by rural and urban areas.
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28 We estimated the incidence of four outcomes of depressive symptoms: having depressive
29 symptoms in the first follow-up survey (2013-2014); having depressive symptoms in the second
30 follow-up survey (2015-2016); ever having depressive symptoms in the first or the second
31 follow-up survey; and consistently having depressive symptoms in both follow-up surveys.
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45 **Prospective analysis.** Baseline characteristics of the participants were summarized as
46 frequency and percentage for categorical variables and mean and standard deviation or median
47 and interquartile range for continuous variables. Associations of baseline health conditions,
48 including chronic conditions, overweight/obesity, sleep duration, and self-perceived health status,
49 with the incidence of ever having depressive symptoms in 4 years of follow-up were evaluated
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3 by a multivariate logistic regression model, while controlling for all covariates as mentioned
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5 above. Odds ratios (ORs) and the corresponding 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were reported.
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7 The SAS 9.4 (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, North Carolina) was used to perform the analyses. All the
8
9 p values were two-sided, and $p < 0.05$ was considered significant.
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11 12 **Results**

13 14 **Sample Characteristics**

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16 A total of 10,288 participants aged 45 years or older was included in the analysis. As
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18 shown in Table 1, the average age of all participants was 58.5 years and roughly half participants
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20 (49.3%) were women. Most of participants (73.3%) lived in rural areas and 60.6% participants
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22 had primary education or above. The majority of participants (90.0%) were married or living
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24 with a partner at the time of data collection. About a third of the participants (31.5%) were
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26 current smokers and 17.9% were current regular drinkers. Participants had an average BMI of
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28 23.7 kg/m². The mean duration of sleep per night was 6.7 hours, and less than 20% of
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30 participants perceived their health status as very good or excellent. The mean CES-D short form
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32 score was 5.1 at baseline.
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37 38 **Incidence of Depressive Symptoms**

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40 As shown in Table 2 and in Figure 1, the incidence of ever having depressive symptoms
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42 in 4 years was 22.3% (95% CI: 21.3%-23.3%). The incidence was much higher in rural areas
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44 than that in urban areas (25.7% vs. 15.3%, $p < .0001$). Women had a higher incidence of
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46 depressive symptoms than men (27.9% vs. 16.7%, $p < .0001$). There is no clear pattern of the
47
48 incidence of depressive symptoms over age groups (Figure 1). The incidence was highest among
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50 the 65-70 years of age group and lowest among the 45-50 years of age group.
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54 55 **Baseline Risk Factors and Incident Depressive Symptoms**

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3 As shown in Table 3, in the fully adjusted multivariable logistic regression model,
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5 nighttime sleep duration and self-perceived health status were both inversely associated with the
6
7 risk of depressive symptoms. Specifically, participants with one-hour longer of nighttime sleep
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9 had a 10% (95% CI: 7%-13%, $p<.0001$) lower risk of developing depressive symptoms in 4
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11 years of follow up. Compared to individuals who perceived their health status as poor, those who
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13 perceived their health status as fair, good, very good, and excellent had a 42% (95% CI: 39%-
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15 52%), 47% (95% CI: 36%-57%), 64% (95% CI: 54%-72%), and 62% (95% CI: 43%-74%) lower
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17 risk of developing depressive symptoms, respectively. In addition, four chronic conditions,
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19 including diabetes (OR=1.19, 95% CI: 1.00-1.42, $p=.04$), chronic kidney disease (OR=1.32, 95%
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21 CI: 1.04-1.67, $p=.02$), chronic digestive disorders (OR=1.15, 95% CI: 1.01-1.31, $p=.04$), and
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23 arthritis (OR=1.43, 95% CI: 1.28-1.61, $p<.0001$), were associated with higher risk of depressive
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25 symptoms. However, baseline BMI was not associated with the onset of depressive symptoms in
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27 this population (OR=0.99, 95% CI: 0.97-1.01). Chronic lung disease ($p=.001$), heart disease
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29 ($p=.004$), and asthma ($p=.02$) were positively associated with incidence of depressive symptoms
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31 in the raw analysis, but became non-significant in the fully adjusted model (all $p>.05$).
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37 Discussion

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40 Through the analysis of data from a nationally representative sample of mid-aged and
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42 older Chinese adults, we found that the incidence of depressive symptoms in a 4-year follow-up
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44 was as high as 22.3%. Large disparities in the incidence of depressive symptoms were observed
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46 between rural and urban areas and between men and women. Furthermore, longer nighttime
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48 sleep duration and better self-perceived health status were both associated with lower risk of
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50 depressive symptoms. In addition, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, chronic digestive disorders,
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3 and arthritis at baseline increased the risk of depressive symptoms. However, baseline BMI was
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5 not associated with depressive symptoms in this population.
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8 Our study found that in four years of follow-up, about 22.3% of the mid-aged and older
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10 Chinese adults developed depressive symptoms. Using the same database, a recent study
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12 reported that the prevalence of depressive symptoms at CHARLS baseline survey was up to 26.2%
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14¹³. Collectively, these findings revealed that depressive symptoms were a major public health
15
16 challenge in China, and intervention programs should be developed to reduce the burden of
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18 depressive symptoms. Furthermore, large disparities were also observed between rural and urban
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20 residents and between men and women. In particular, women and residents living in rural areas
21
22 were at a higher risk of developing depressive symptoms. The high incidence rate was not only
23
24 relevant to mid-aged and older Chinese adults, but also had implications for young children's
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26 developmental outcomes. Many depressive symptoms cases remained undiagnosed, and even
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28 among those who were aware of the condition, few of them sought treatment due to cultural
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30 stigma^{9 10}. Mid-aged and elderly grandparents are the primary caregivers of infants, toddlers,
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32 and young children in rural China. Depressed caregivers were more likely to show negative
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34 parenting interactions (e.g., limited facial and behavioral affect) with their children, and these
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36 interactions were directly relevant for children's development^{29 30}. A strong negative correlation
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38 has been reported between the levels of depression of grandmothers and the levels of
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40 developmental outcomes of the grandchildren in their care, including cognitive, language, social-
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42 emotional, and motor functions^{31 32}. Taken together, changes in social policies and intervention
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44 programs should be developed to address timely diagnosis and treatment of depression for these
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46 people, which will help improve young children's developmental outcomes in rural China.
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3 Individuals with longer nighttime sleep duration had a lower risk of depressive symptoms.
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5 This finding is in line with previous studies^{33 34}. Sleep disorders are often the presenting and
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7 core symptoms of depression³⁵. However, treatment of depression did not resolve sleep
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9 symptoms, which may confer a greater risk for depression recurrence and relapse³⁵. Therefore,
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11 sleep deprivation should be at least considered as an early indicator of depressive symptoms.
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13 Individuals with sleep deprivation should be aware of their high risk of depressive symptoms and
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15 increase nighttime sleep duration.
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19 Better self-perceived health status at baseline was associated with a lower risk of
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21 depressive symptoms in the current study. The finding is consistent with studies among other
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23 populations^{36 37}. Self-perceived health is a powerful indicator of the overall health status of
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25 elderly people³⁸. Many factors, including sociodemographic characteristics, chronic diseases,
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27 functional status, social relationships, neighborhood environment, and nutrition pattern, are all
28
29 important determinants of self-perceived health status³⁸. These factors are also associated with
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31 depressive symptoms. The current study adjusted most of the factors, except for functional status,
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33 social relationship, and nutrition pattern, which were not available in the CHARLS database.
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35 However, poorer self-perceived health status was still significantly associated with a higher risk
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37 of depressive symptoms. Future studies additionally controlling for those factors will help
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39 evaluate the contribution of those factors to the association of self-perceived health status with
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41 depressive symptoms. Furthermore, such study may also help delineate whether self-perceived
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43 health status may represent other factors that may lead to depressive symptoms. Finally, previous
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45 studies also found that individuals with depressive disorders were more likely to report poor self-
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47 perceived health status^{39 40}. Therefore, there might be a bidirectional association between
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3 depressive symptoms and self-perceived health status. Future studies examining the bidirectional
4 relationship are therefore needed.
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8 Among 12 chronic conditions, baseline chronic kidney disease increased the risk of
9 depressive symptoms at follow-up. Although the underlying mechanisms have not been well
10 understood, some authors suggested that the psychosocial and biologic changes in dialysis may
11 explain this relationship ⁴¹. In addition to chronic kidney disease, baseline diabetes also
12 conferred a higher risk of symptoms of depression over time in this study. Similar results were
13 reported in a meta-analysis of 11 studies, which found that people with diabetes at baseline had a
14 24% higher risk of developing depression at follow-up compared to those without diabetes ⁴².
15 Furthermore, a high prevalence of depression among people with diabetes and/or chronic kidney
16 disease has also been reported in cross-sectional studies ⁴³⁻⁴⁵. In concordance with these findings,
17 this study added further evidence that compared to other chronic conditions at baseline, baseline
18 chronic kidney disease and diabetes were more likely to be associated with depressive symptoms
19 over time in a population of mid-aged and older Chinese adults.
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35 Consistent with our study, a growing body of evidence reveals a high prevalence and
36 incidence of depression among people with arthritis. For example, in a recent meta-analysis, the
37 prevalence of major depressive disorder among patients with rheumatoid arthritis was 17% ⁴⁶. In
38 a population-based cohort in Taiwan, patients with rheumatoid arthritis were 2.06 times more
39 likely to develop depression compared with the control patients ⁴⁷. The high prevalence and
40 incidence of depression among patients with arthritis may be attributed to several factors,
41 including the impact of the diagnosis with no cure, arthritis symptoms and flare-ups, loss of work
42 productivity, and side effects of medications ⁴⁸. In the current study, we found that chronic
43 digestive disorders at baseline conferred a higher risk for depressive symptoms over time. In line
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3 with this finding, using the National Health Insurance Research Database in Taiwan, Lee et al.
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5 found that irritable bowel syndrome was a risk factor for subsequent depressive and anxiety
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7 disorders ⁴⁹. The digestive system is sensitive to the impact of emotional factors, because the
8
9 function of digestive system is jointly controlled by the endocrine system and vegetative nervous
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11 system, and the center of both systems is located at the same place as the center of emotion ⁵⁰.
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15 Overweight/obesity is well established to interfere with mental health, with depressive
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17 symptoms being more common among overweight/obese individuals than their normal-weight
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19 counterparts, especially in overweight/obese women ^{51 52}. This relationship was further
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21 confirmed by a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies, in which excess weight at baseline
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23 increased a higher risk for subsequent depression at follow-up ⁵³. In contrast to these findings
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25 from Western and European countries, using data from a prospective survey of a large,
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27 representative sample of mid-aged and elderly community-dwelling residents in Mainland China,
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29 we did not find a relationship between baseline BMI and subsequent depressive symptoms over
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31 time. These inconsistent findings may suggest that because participants in the current study were
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33 predominantly low in BMI at baseline (mean baseline BMI was 23.7 kg/m²), their likelihood of
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35 experiencing depressive symptoms may have been lower compared to those participants reported
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37 in Luppino et al ⁵³. However, these are preliminary findings that need to be further investigated
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39 in future prospective studies in this population.
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45 The study has several important strengths. First, to the best of our knowledge, this is the
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47 first study that examined the incidence of depressive symptoms in a nationally representative
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49 population in China. As noted above, previous studies have primarily focused on the prevalence
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51 of depressive symptoms ^{3 11 13 14} or investigated the incidence of depressive symptoms in a
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53 regional sample ⁵⁴. Second, since the sample was representative of community-dwelling mid-
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3 aged and older Chinese adults, the results can be generalized to mid-aged and older Chinese
4 adults. Third, a Chinese specific cut-off point of the CES-D short form has been used, and the
5 cut-off point was validated among mid-aged and older Chinese adults ²¹. Therefore, our study
6 provided a more reliable estimate of the incidence of depressive symptoms. Finally, strict quality
7 control measures, including GPS matching, data checking, recording and checking interviews,
8 and calling back participants, were implemented at each stage of the CHARLS to ensure high
9 quality data.
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19 There are also some limitations in this study that should be acknowledged. First,
20 depressive symptoms were based on self-reports instead of clinical diagnosis. Therefore,
21 information bias may be present. However, with a longitudinal design, information bias in the
22 current study was likely to be non-differential. Since non-differential misclassification generally
23 affects the association estimates towards the null, our study findings were more robust. Second,
24 nighttime sleep duration was measured based on self-reports. The use of self-report measures in
25 the CHARLS surveys may have biased study results, since participants may consistently under-
26 or overestimate their nighttime sleep duration ⁵⁵. Objective or direct measures of sleep duration
27 should be used to increase precision and accuracy of self-report assessment methods. Finally,
28 this study was a prospective analysis of baseline risk factors of depressive symptoms at follow-
29 up, and no causal associations between these predictors and depressive symptoms can be drawn
30 from the analysis.
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47 The findings of the current study have important implications for clinical practice. Health
48 care professionals are encouraged to address the needs for better mental health in older adults ⁵⁶.
49 In view of the high incidence of depressive symptoms (22.3%) among mid-aged and elderly
50 Chinese adults, the findings of this study highlight the importance of developing an appropriate
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3 screening test to identify depressive symptoms for those who are vulnerable and ensure these
4 individuals can receive early interventions for depressive symptoms. The screening test should
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6 include items such as areas of living (rural or urban areas), gender, nighttime sleep duration, self-
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8 perceived health status, and certain chronic conditions, especially chronic kidney disease,
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10 diabetes, arthritis, and chronic digestive disorders. In addition, intervention strategies that
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12 address short nighttime sleep duration may be used to alleviate depressive symptoms and
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14 improve mental health in this population. Intervention programs should also be prioritized to
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16 target at specific populations, such as women and residents living in rural areas, as these
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18 populations were at a higher risk of developing depressive symptoms. Finally, new patients with
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20 chronic kidney disease, diabetes, arthritis, or chronic digestive disorders should be screened for
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22 depressive symptoms using the CES-D short form at the initial visit. Persons with depressive
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24 symptoms (a score of 12 or higher) should then be assessed by a clinician using the structured
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26 clinical interview for Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition.
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28 Potential participants with serious depressive symptoms should be referred immediately to a
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30 mental health professional. Individuals with these chronic conditions are particularly vulnerable
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32 to the deleterious effects of affective symptoms, since symptoms of depression is a known risk
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34 factor for noncompliance with medical treatment and adverse health outcomes^{48 49 57 58}.

35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 **Conclusions**

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44 To conclude, our study found a high incidence of depressive symptoms in 4 years of
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46 follow-up among a nationally representative mid-aged and older Chinese population. In addition,
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48 great disparities in the incidence of depressive symptoms were observed between individuals
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50 living in rural and urban areas and between men and women. Furthermore, we identified that
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52 worse self-perceived health, shorter nighttime sleep duration, diabetes, chronic kidney disease,
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3 chronic digestive disorders, and arthritis at baseline increased the risk for depressive symptoms.
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5 These findings supported the importance of baseline status to longitudinal changes in depressive
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7 symptoms. Interventions for vulnerable mid-aged and older adults should focus on addressing
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9 short nighttime sleep duration. These findings also help identify individuals at a higher risk for
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11 depressive symptoms, such as those with chronic kidney disease, chronic digestive disorders,
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13 arthritis, and diabetes, or women and residents living in rural areas, so that early interventions
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15 can be implemented to prevent depressive symptoms in these people.
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19 **Figure Legend**

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21 Figure 1. The Incidence of Depressive Symptoms in 4 Years of Follow-up among
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23 Participants of the CHARLS
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Contributorship Statement

All authors contribute to the conception and design of this study. YW, YY, and DW were responsible for the design, analysis, drafting and revision of this manuscript. CL and JL were responsible for interpretation of data and preparation of the manuscript.

Competing Interests Statement

None declared.

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Patient Consent for Publication

Not required.

Data Sharing Statement

The study used a public data from the CHARLS that were obtained from the CHARLS home page at <http://charls.pku.edu.cn/en>.

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Tables

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of the CHARLS participants free of depressive symptoms

Variable	Distribution
N	10,288
age, years, mean (SD)	58.5 (9.8)
Male, n (%)	5845 (50.7%)
Living in rural areas, n (%)	8,440 (73.3%)
Education, n (%)	
<i>No formal education or illiterate</i>	2,736 (23.7%)
<i>Some primary school</i>	1,804 (15.7%)
<i>Finished primary school</i>	2,590 (22.5%)
<i>Junior high school or above</i>	4,394 (38.1%)
Currently married, n (%)	10,375 (90.0%)
Smoking status, n (%)	
<i>Current smoker</i>	3,629 (31.5%)
<i>Former smoker</i>	1,034 (9.0%)
<i>Never smoking</i>	6,868 (60.0%)
Drinking status, n (%)	
<i>Regular drinkers</i>	1,951 (17.9%)
<i>Occasional drinkers</i>	476 (4.4%)
<i>Former drinkers</i>	646 (5.9%)
<i>Never drinking</i>	7,833 (71.8%)
Weight, kg, mean (SD)	60 (11.8)
Height, m, mean (SD)	1.6 (0.1)
Body mass index, kg/m ² , mean (SD)	23.7 (4)
Sleeping duration, hours, mean (SD)	6.7 (1.7)
CES-D short form score	5.1 (3.3)
Self-perceived health status, n (%)	
<i>Excellent</i>	483 (4.2%)
<i>Very good</i>	1,744 (15.1%)
<i>Good</i>	4,136 (35.9%)
<i>Fair</i>	3,977 (34.5%)
<i>Poor</i>	1,187 (10.3%)
Chronic conditions, n (%)	
<i>Hypertension</i>	4,045 (40.3%)
<i>Dyslipidemia</i>	1,016 (9.0%)
<i>Diabetes</i>	1,210 (15.0%)
<i>Cancer</i>	97 (0.8%)
<i>Liver disease</i>	387 (3.4%)
<i>Heart disease</i>	1,162 (10.1%)
<i>Stroke</i>	188 (1.6%)
<i>Kidney disease</i>	563 (4.9%)

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3	<i>Gastrointestinal disease</i>	2,180 (18.9%)
4	<i>Dementia</i>	105 (0.9%)
5	<i>Arthritis</i>	3,221 (28.0%)
6	<i>Asthma</i>	312 (2.7%)
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8 *Note.* CES-D=Center for Epidemiologic Study of Depression short form; SD=standard deviation.
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Table 2. Incidence of depressive symptoms among the CHARLS participants

	Ever having depressive symptoms	Depressive symptoms in both visits 2 & 3	Depressive symptoms in 2 years	Depressive symptoms in 4 years
Overall	22.3 (21.3-23.3)	4.4 (4.0-4.9)	13.2 (12.5-14.1)	16.8 (15.9-17.7)
Rural	25.7 (24.6-26.8)	5.3 (4.8-5.8)	15.3 (14.3-16.2)	18.8 (17.8-19.8)
Urban	15.3 (13.4-17.2)	2.6 (1.9-3.3)	9.0 (7.4-10.6)	12.2 (10.4-14.1)
Men	16.7 (15.5-17.9)	3.0 (2.5-3.5)	9.9 (9.0-10.9)	12.2 (11.1-13.2)
Women	27.9 (26.4-29.4)	5.8 (5.1-6.6)	16.6 (15.3-17.9)	21.5 (20.1-22.9)

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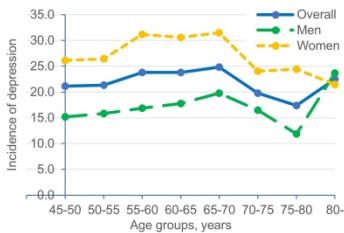
Table 3. Raw and multi-variables adjusted associations with the incidence of depressive symptoms in 4 years of follow-up.

Variables	Multi-Variate Adjusted		Raw Association	
	OR (95% CI)	P	OR (95% CI)	P
Age, per year older	0.99 (0.98-0.99)	0.001	0.99 (0.99-1.00)	0.59
Male vs. Female	0.60 (0.51-0.71)	<.0001	0.51 (0.46-0.56)	<.0001
Education level				
<i>No formal education or illiterate</i>	ref.	<.0001	ref.	<.0001
<i>Some primary school</i>	1.06 (0.90-1.25)		0.93 (0.80-1.08)	
<i>Finished primary school</i>	0.83 (0.71-0.97)		0.67 (0.57-0.77)	
<i>Junior high school or above</i>	0.71 (0.61-0.84)		0.48 (0.42-0.55)	
Rural vs. Urban	1.61 (1.38-1.88)	<.0001	1.72 (1.50-1.96)	<.0001
Not married vs Married	1.25 (1.04-1.51)	0.02	1.28 (1.08-1.51)	0.004
Smoking status				
<i>Non-smokers</i>	ref.		ref.	
<i>Current smokers</i>	1.02 (0.86-1.20)	0.03	0.51 (0.41-0.62)	<.0001
<i>Former smokers</i>	0.75 (0.59-0.96)		0.68 (0.60-0.76)	
Drinking status				
<i>Never drinkers</i>	Ref.		ref.	
<i>Former drinkers</i>	1.02 (0.80-1.30)	0.15	0.84 (0.67-1.04)	<.0001
<i>Occasional drinkers</i>	0.79 (0.59-1.06)		0.59 (0.45-0.78)	
<i>Regular drinkers</i>	0.85 (0.71-1.01)		0.59 (0.51-0.68)	
Body mass index, per 1 kg/m ² increase	0.99 (0.98-1.01)	0.20	0.99 (0.98-1.00)	0.14
Self-perceived health status				
<i>Excellent</i>	0.36 (0.25-0.52)	<.0001	0.28 (0.20-0.39)	<.0001
<i>Very good</i>	0.36 (0.29-0.45)		0.28 (0.23-0.35)	
<i>Good</i>	0.53 (0.44-0.63)		0.45 (0.38-0.53)	
<i>Fair</i>	0.61 (0.52-0.73)		0.56 (0.48-0.66)	
<i>Poor</i>	ref.		ref.	
Sleep duration, per hour longer	0.89 (0.87-0.92)	<.0001	0.88 (0.85-0.90)	<.0001
Hypertension (Y vs. N)	1.07 (0.95-1.21)	0.25	1.07 (0.96-1.18)	0.22
Dyslipidemia (Y vs. N)	0.85 (0.69-1.04)	0.12	0.91 (0.76-1.09)	0.29
Diabetes (Y vs. N)	1.19 (1.00-1.42)	0.04	1.11 (0.95-2.30)	0.19
Cancer (Y vs. N)	0.92 (0.48-1.77)	0.80	1.17 (0.65-2.12)	0.61
Chronic Lung Disease (Y vs. N)	1.18 (0.97-1.44)	0.10	1.33 (1.12-1.58)	0.001
Chronic Liver Disease (Y vs. N)	0.90 (0.67-1.22)	0.51	1.04 (0.79-1.37)	0.81
Heart Disease (Y vs. N)	1.06 (0.88-1.28)	0.54	1.27 (1.08-1.49)	0.004
Stroke (Y vs. N)	0.88 (0.56-1.39)	0.59	1.12 (0.75-1.66)	0.58
Chronic Kidney Disease (Y vs. N)	1.32 (1.04-1.67)	0.02	1.45 (1.16-1.80)	0.001
Chronic Digestive Disorders (Y vs. N)	1.15 (1.01-1.31)	0.04	1.43 (1.26-1.61)	<.0001
Psychological Disorders (Y vs. N)	1.00 (0.53-1.89)	0.99	1.44 (0.81-2.56)	0.22
Dementia (Y vs. N)	1.31 (0.72-2.38)	0.37	1.15 (0.67-1.97)	0.62
Arthritis (Y vs. N)	1.43 (1.28-1.61)	<.0001	1.72 (1.54-1.91)	<.0001
Asthma (Y vs. N)	1.25 (0.90-1.75)	0.19	1.43 (1.06-1.91)	0.02

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3 Note. CI=confidence interval; OR=odds ratio. All analysis was conducted at a 5% significance
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STROBE 2007 (v4) Statement—Checklist of items that should be included in reports of *cohort studies*

Section/Topic	Item #	Recommendation	Reported on page #
Title and abstract	1	(a) Indicate the study's design with a commonly used term in the title or the abstract	3
		(b) Provide in the abstract an informative and balanced summary of what was done and what was found	3
Introduction			
Background/rationale	2	Explain the scientific background and rationale for the investigation being reported	6-7
Objectives	3	State specific objectives, including any prespecified hypotheses	7
Methods			
Study design	4	Present key elements of study design early in the paper	8
Setting	5	Describe the setting, locations, and relevant dates, including periods of recruitment, exposure, follow-up, and data collection	8-9
Participants	6	(a) Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of selection of participants. Describe methods of follow-up	8
		(b) For matched studies, give matching criteria and number of exposed and unexposed	NA
Variables	7	Clearly define all outcomes, exposures, predictors, potential confounders, and effect modifiers. Give diagnostic criteria, if applicable	9-11
Data sources/ measurement	8*	For each variable of interest, give sources of data and details of methods of assessment (measurement). Describe comparability of assessment methods if there is more than one group	9
Bias	9	Describe any efforts to address potential sources of bias	17
Study size	10	Explain how the study size was arrived at	8
Quantitative variables	11	Explain how quantitative variables were handled in the analyses. If applicable, describe which groupings were chosen and why	12
Statistical methods	12	(a) Describe all statistical methods, including those used to control for confounding	12
		(b) Describe any methods used to examine subgroups and interactions	NA
		(c) Explain how missing data were addressed	NA
		(d) If applicable, explain how loss to follow-up was addressed	NA
		(e) Describe any sensitivity analyses	NA
Results			

Participants	13*	(a) Report numbers of individuals at each stage of study—eg numbers potentially eligible, examined for eligibility, confirmed eligible, included in the study, completing follow-up, and analysed	8
		(b) Give reasons for non-participation at each stage	NA
		(c) Consider use of a flow diagram	NA
Descriptive data	14*	(a) Give characteristics of study participants (eg demographic, clinical, social) and information on exposures and potential confounders	13
		(b) Indicate number of participants with missing data for each variable of interest	NA
		(c) Summarise follow-up time (eg, average and total amount)	8
Outcome data	15*	Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures over time	NA
Main results	16	(a) Give unadjusted estimates and, if applicable, confounder-adjusted estimates and their precision (eg, 95% confidence interval). Make clear which confounders were adjusted for and why they were included	11, 13-14
		(b) Report category boundaries when continuous variables were categorized	NA
		(c) If relevant, consider translating estimates of relative risk into absolute risk for a meaningful time period	NA
Other analyses	17	Report other analyses done—eg analyses of subgroups and interactions, and sensitivity analyses	NA
Discussion			
Key results	18	Summarise key results with reference to study objectives	14
Limitations			
Interpretation	20	Give a cautious overall interpretation of results considering objectives, limitations, multiplicity of analyses, results from similar studies, and other relevant evidence	17
Generalisability	21	Discuss the generalisability (external validity) of the study results	17
Other information			
Funding	22	Give the source of funding and the role of the funders for the present study and, if applicable, for the original study on which the present article is based	20

*Give information separately for cases and controls in case-control studies and, if applicable, for exposed and unexposed groups in cohort and cross-sectional studies.

Note: An Explanation and Elaboration article discusses each checklist item and gives methodological background and published examples of transparent reporting. The STROBE checklist is best used in conjunction with this article (freely available on the Web sites of PLoS Medicine at <http://www.plosmedicine.org/>, Annals of Internal Medicine at <http://www.annals.org/>, and Epidemiology at <http://www.epidem.com/>). Information on the STROBE Initiative is available at www.strobe-statement.org.