

Living Arrangements, Intergenerational Ties, and Wellbeing of Older Adults in China and the Global Context of Population Aging

Workshop on Developing an Agenda for Population Aging and Social Research in LMICs

National Academy of Sciences

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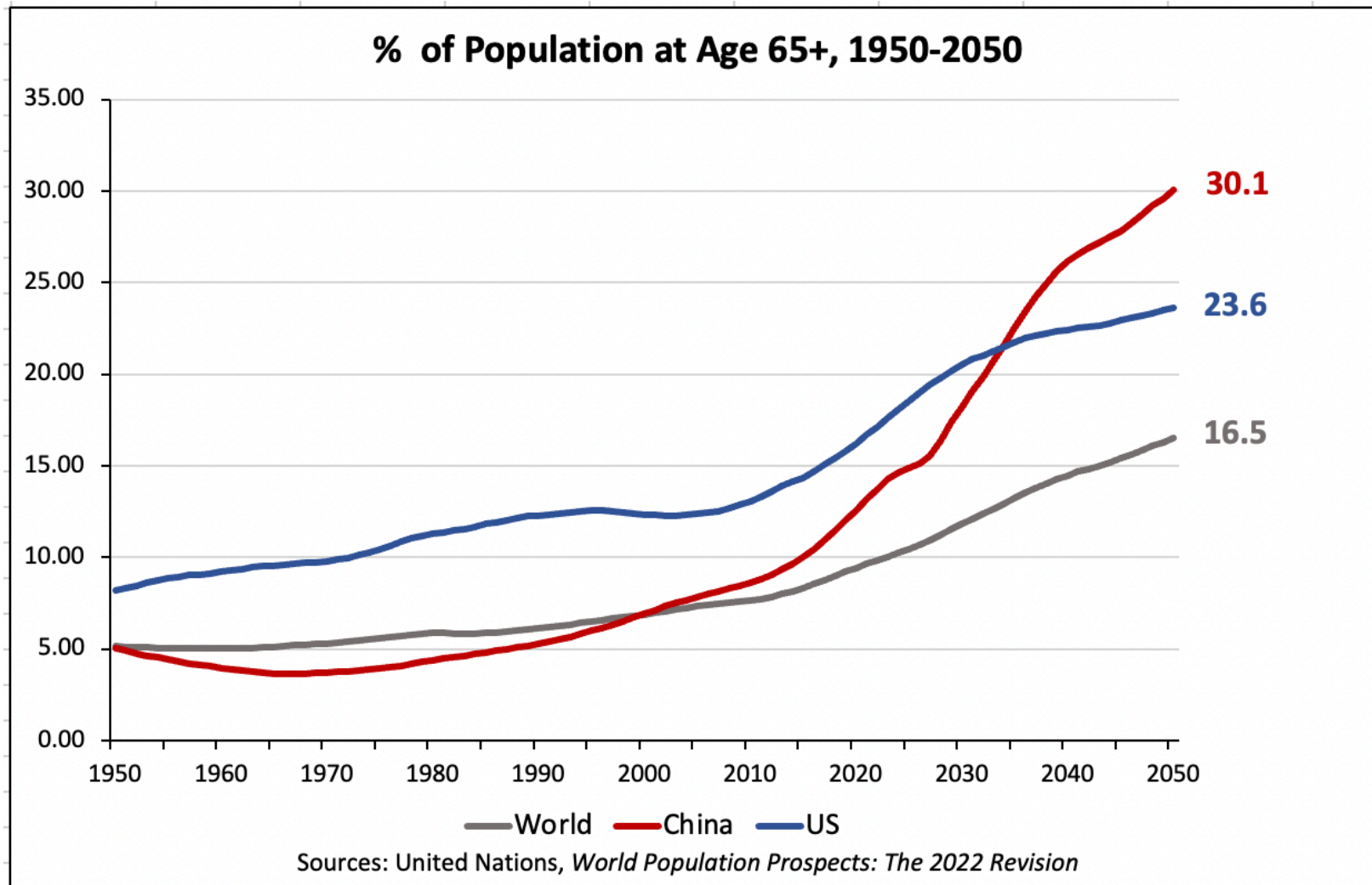
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Professor of Sociology

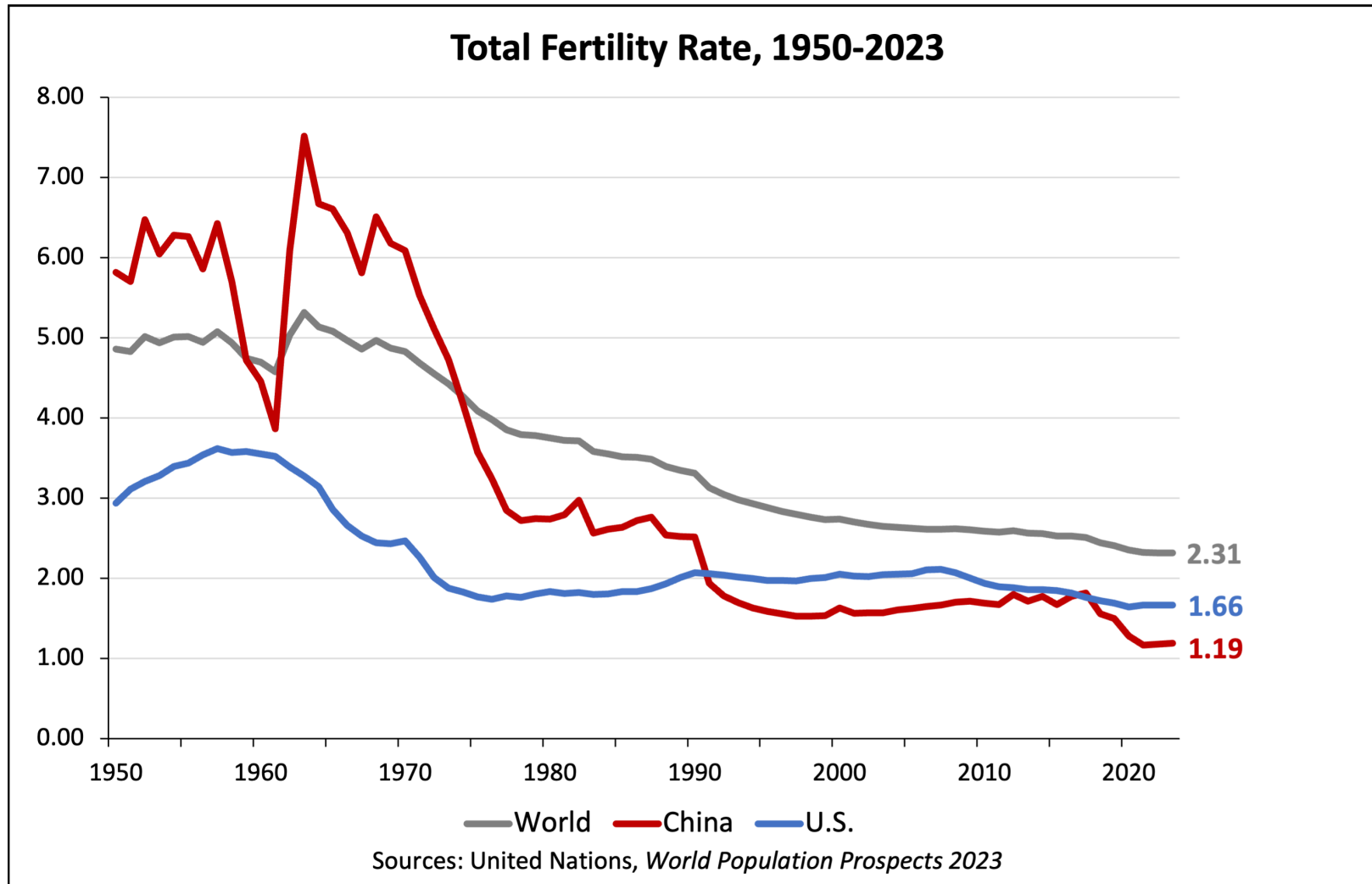
Hopkins Population Center

Johns Hopkins University

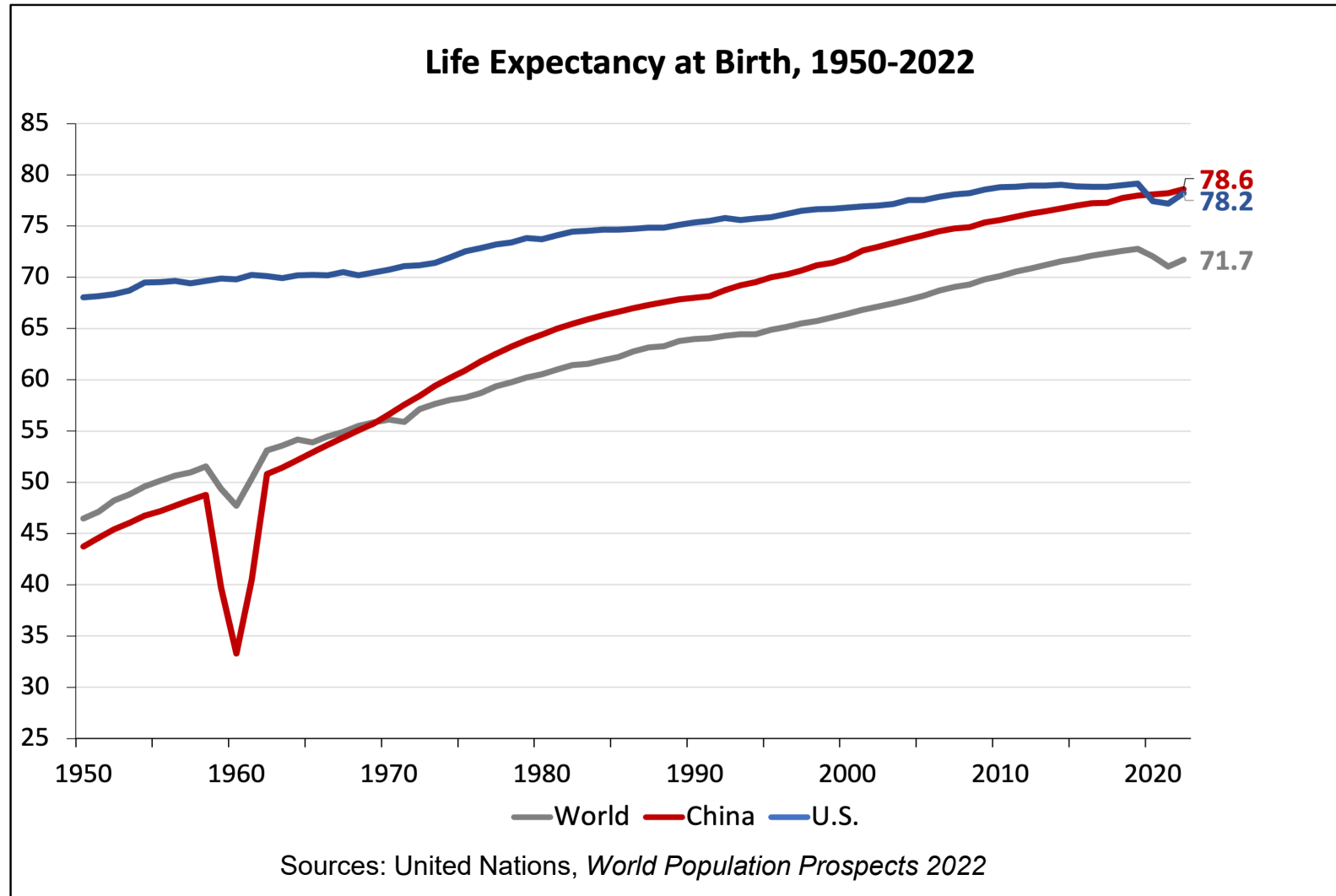
Trends in Population Aging



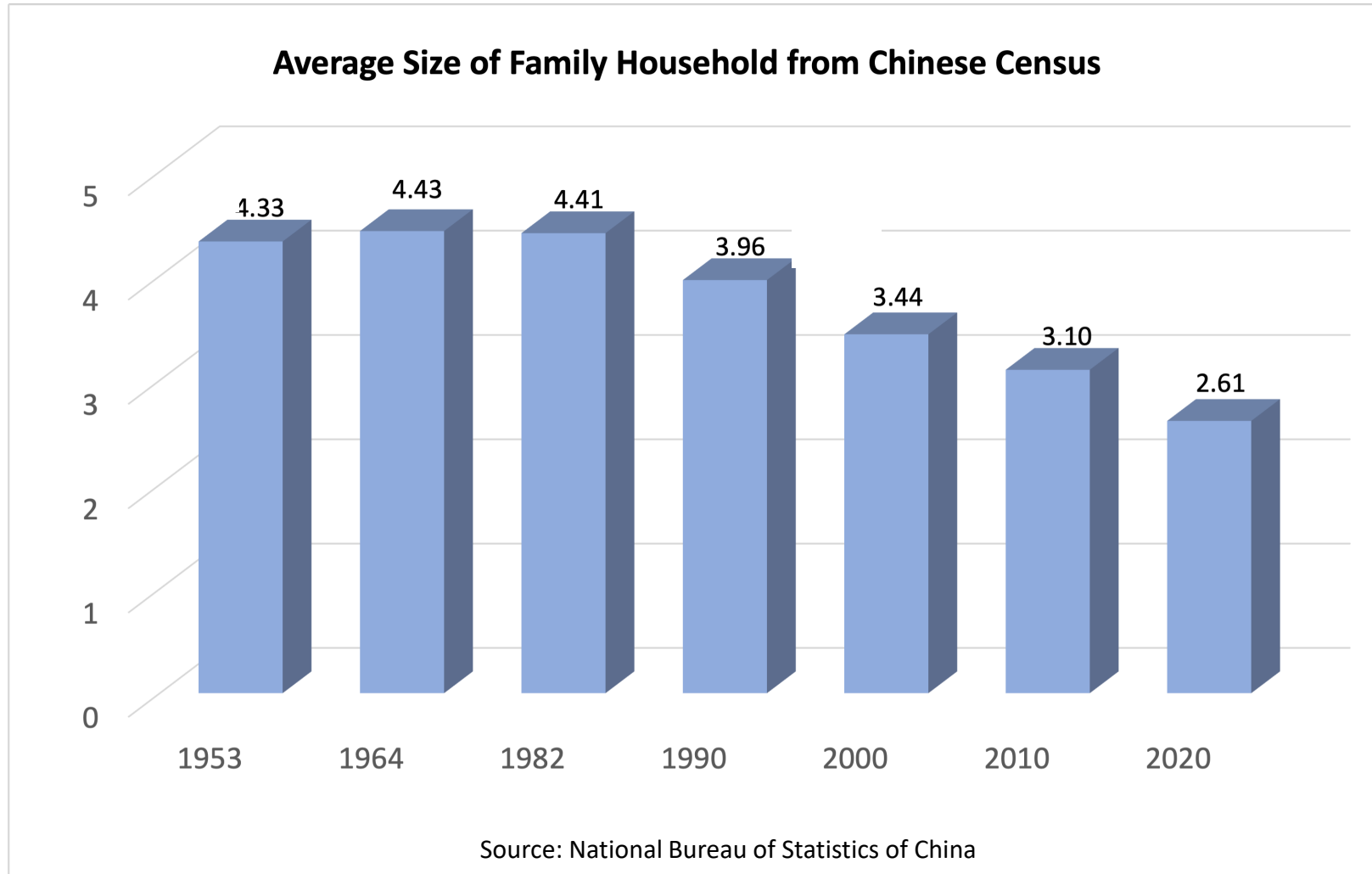
Accelerated Fertility Decline in China



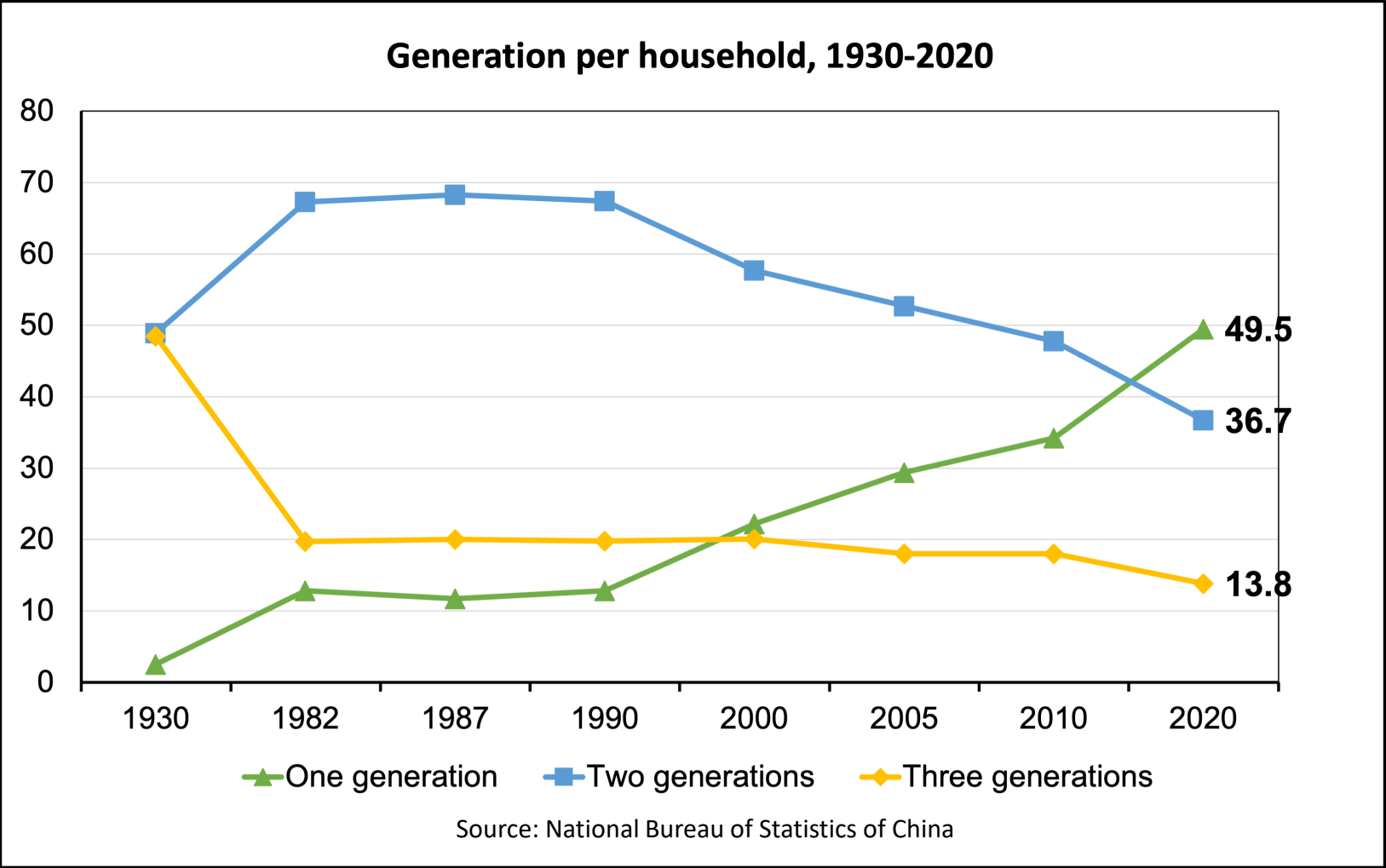
Accelerated Mortality Decline in China



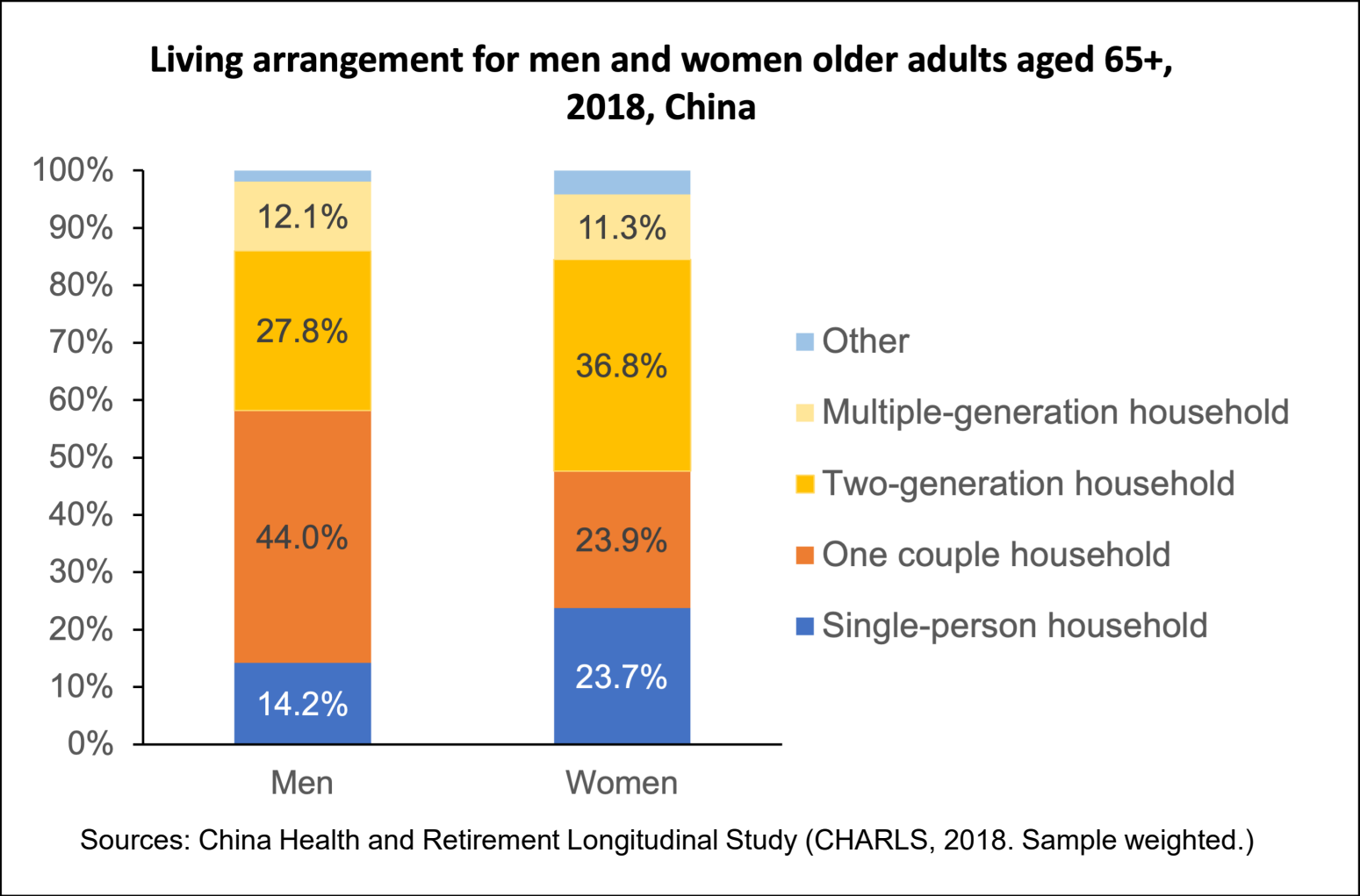
China's Declining Family Size



Changes in Family Structures in China

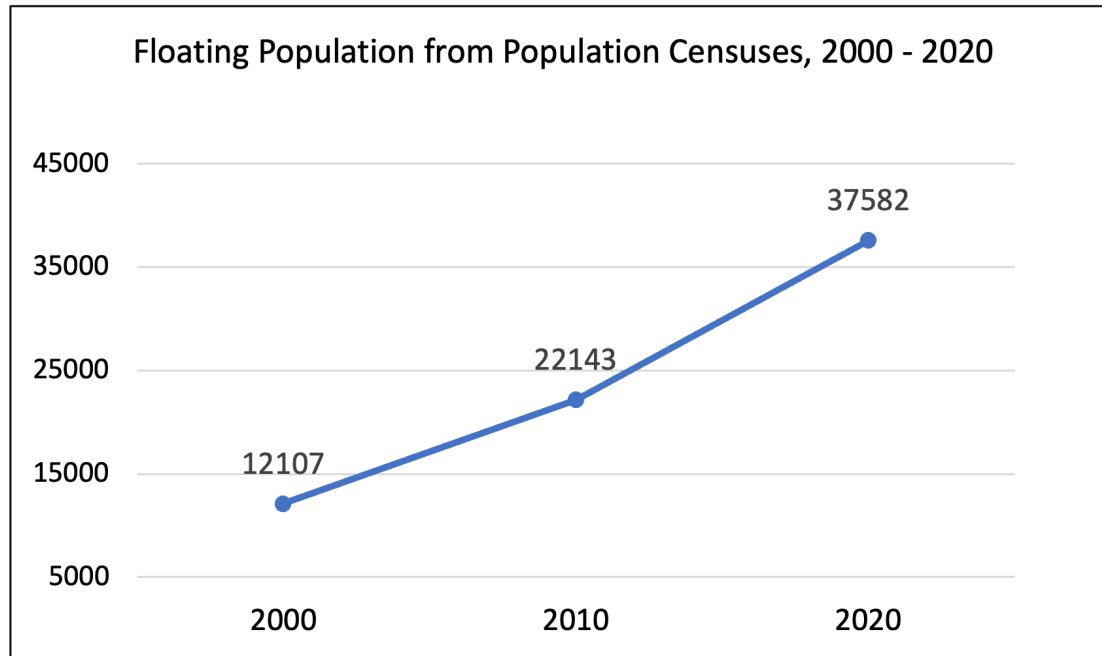


Two and multiple-generation households stay as the most prevalent living arrangement among Chinese older adults, particularly among female older adults. (2018 CHARLS)

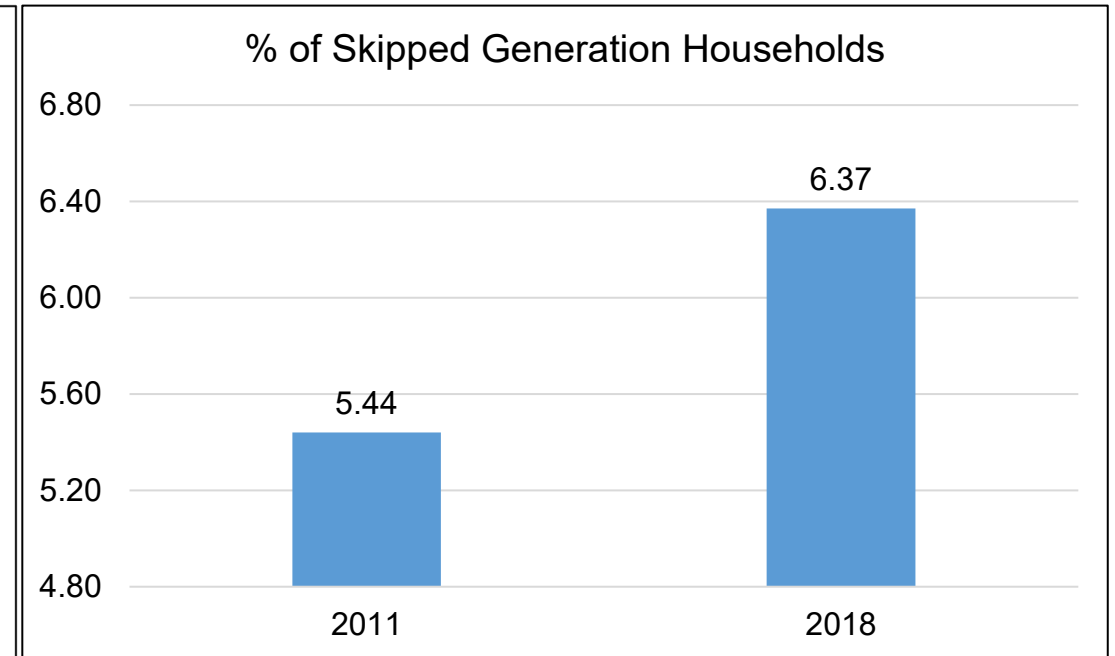


Demographic Trends: Massive Internal Migration

1. Increasing “skipped-generation” households
2. Increasing left-behind older adults

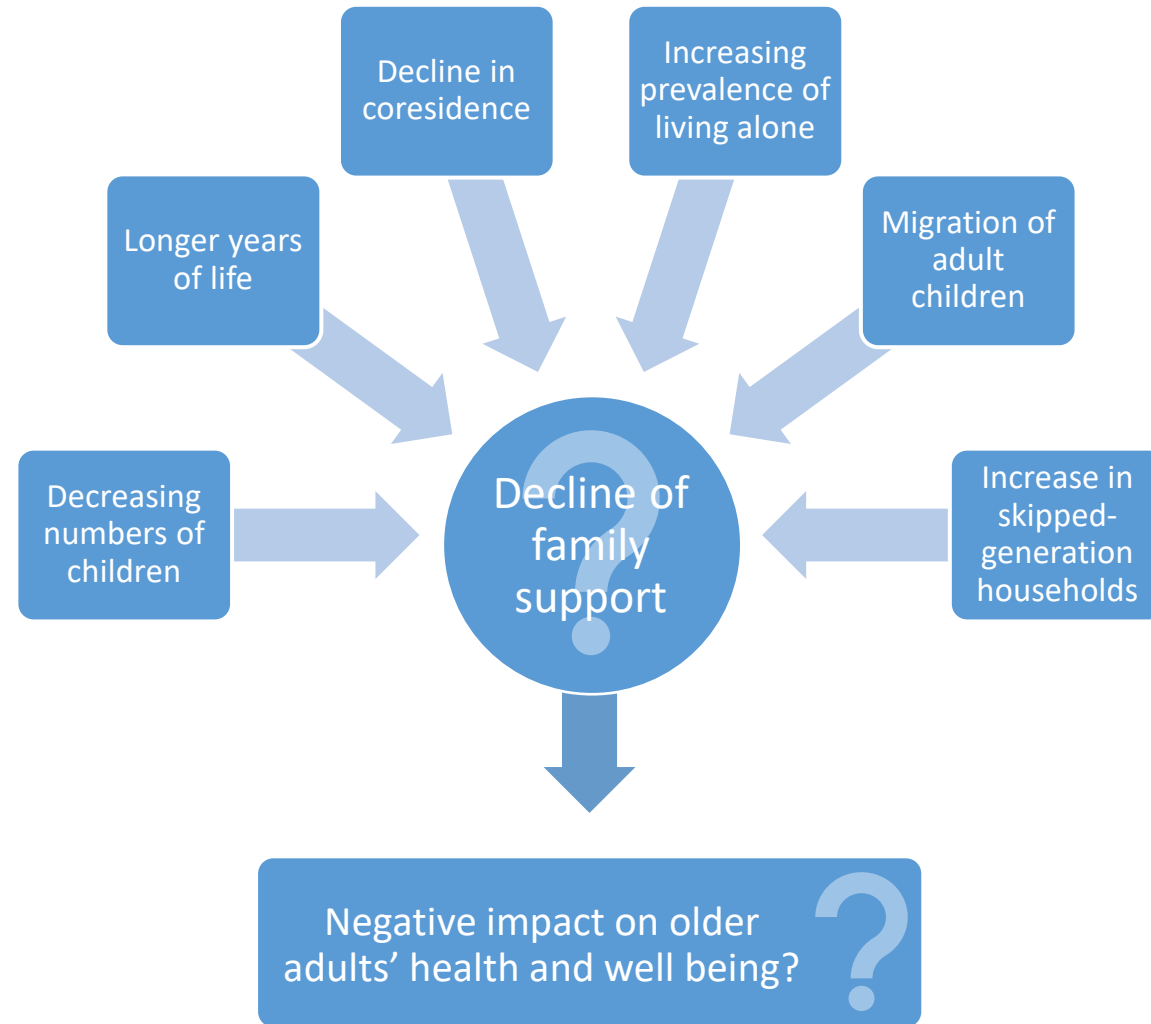


Sources: National Bureau of Statistics of China.



Sources: CHARLS 2011, 2018, for adults aged 45 and above.

Implications of Demographic and Family Changes



My own research journey on the topic of living arrangements and intergenerational ties in China (2001-2023)



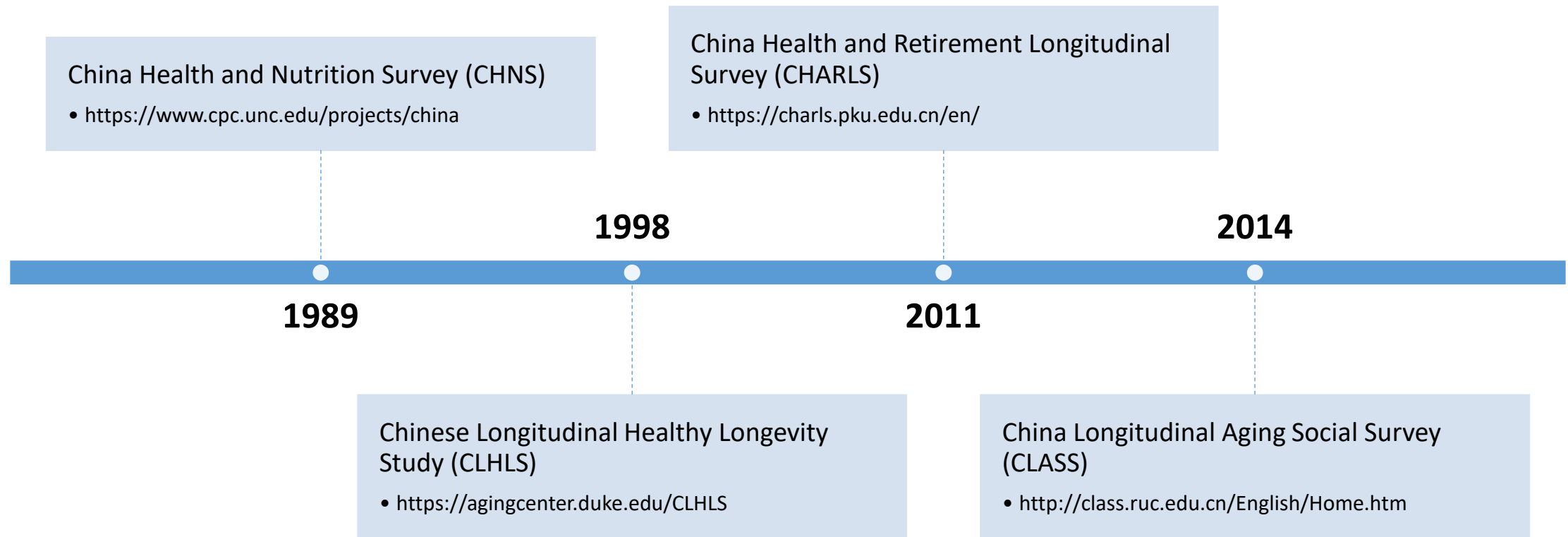
Outcomes

Perspectives
(parents,
grandparents,
adult children)

Modeling
strategies

Datasets

My own research journey on the topic of living arrangements and intergenerational ties in China (2001-2023)



Yes or No?--- Yes and No!

Chen and Short (2008)-Subjective well-being
from CLHLS

Yes, living in a traditional extended household promotes subjective well-being.

Living with a son, the culturally preferred living arrangement is not the most beneficial type of coresidence

Living with a daughter improves positive well-being.

Song and Chen (2018)-Biomarker data from CHARLS

No, living in a multigenerational household offers limited health benefits to rural older adults (when selection is taken into account).

DVs including individual biomarkers (e.g., fasting glucose, HbA1C, cholesterol, blood pressure, pulse) and a summary allostatic load

Parents living in multigenerational households but also with migrant children gain health benefits.

Mixed Findings-why and then what?

Selection

- normative expectations, needs, and temperament of parents and adult children
- change over time, both by historical time and personal time (age and cohort)

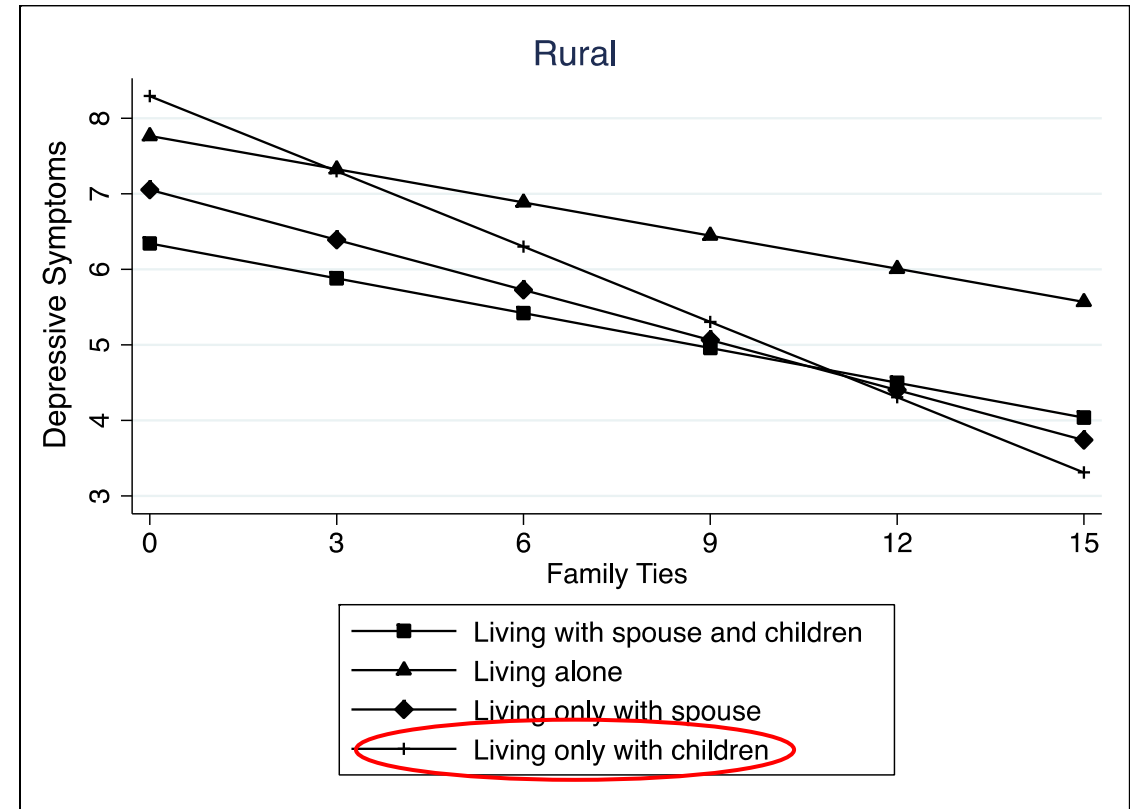
Beyond the living arrangements

- other children (migrant children)
- friendship and family ties
- living alone \neq loneliness
- Proximity (“A bowl of soup’s distance” vs. “under the same roof”)

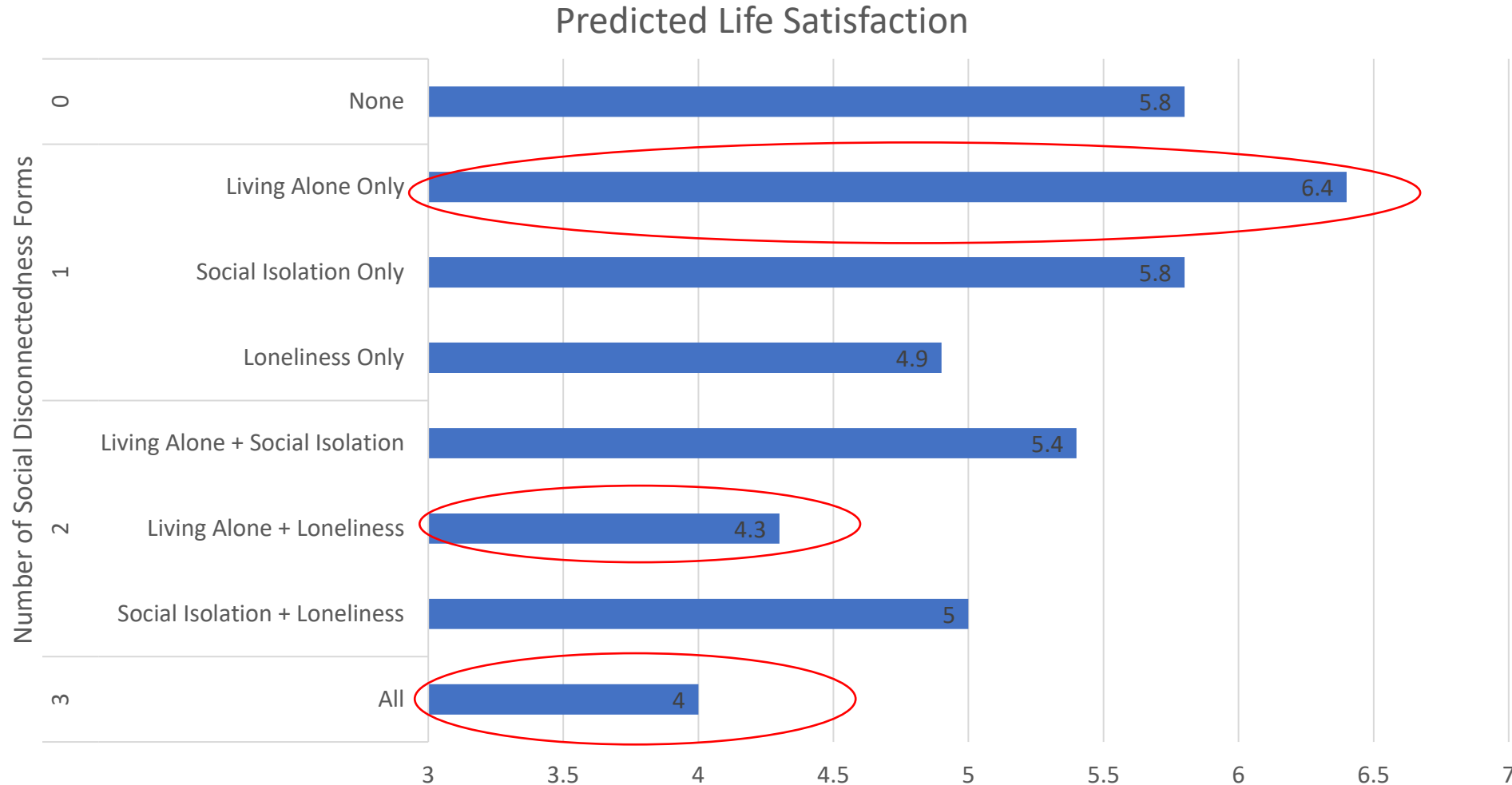
Heterogeneity among extended families

- within-family dynamic (quality of relationship)
- caregiving recipient vs. caregiver

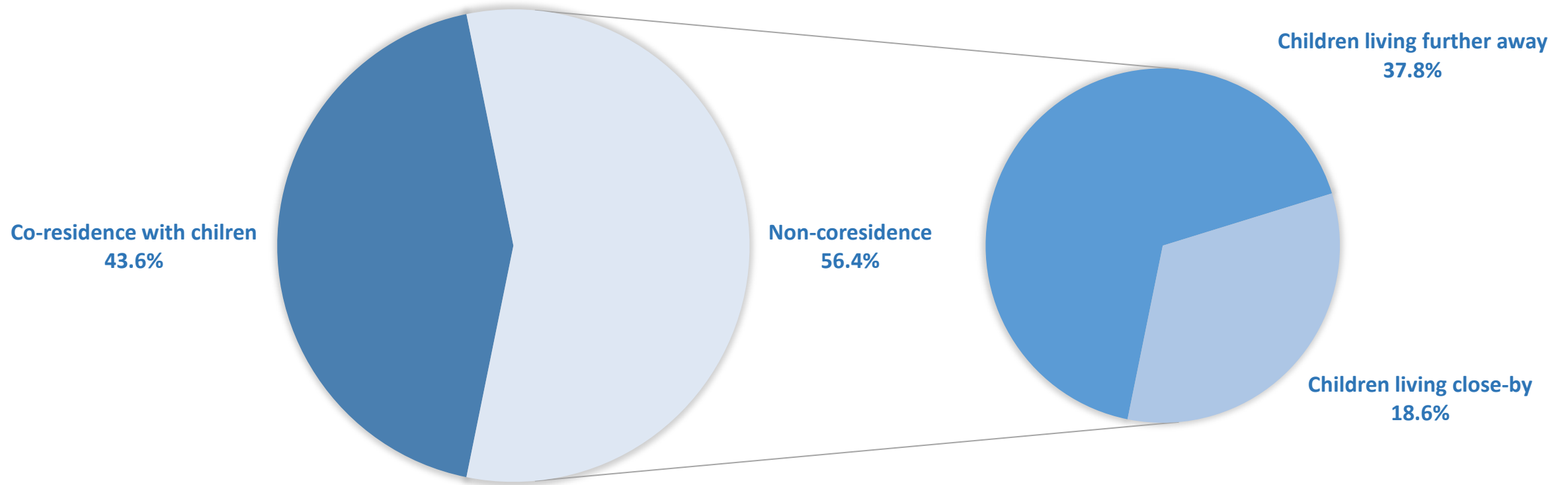
Tang, Lin and Chen 2020 : Living arrangements and friendship and family ties jointly affect depressive symptoms



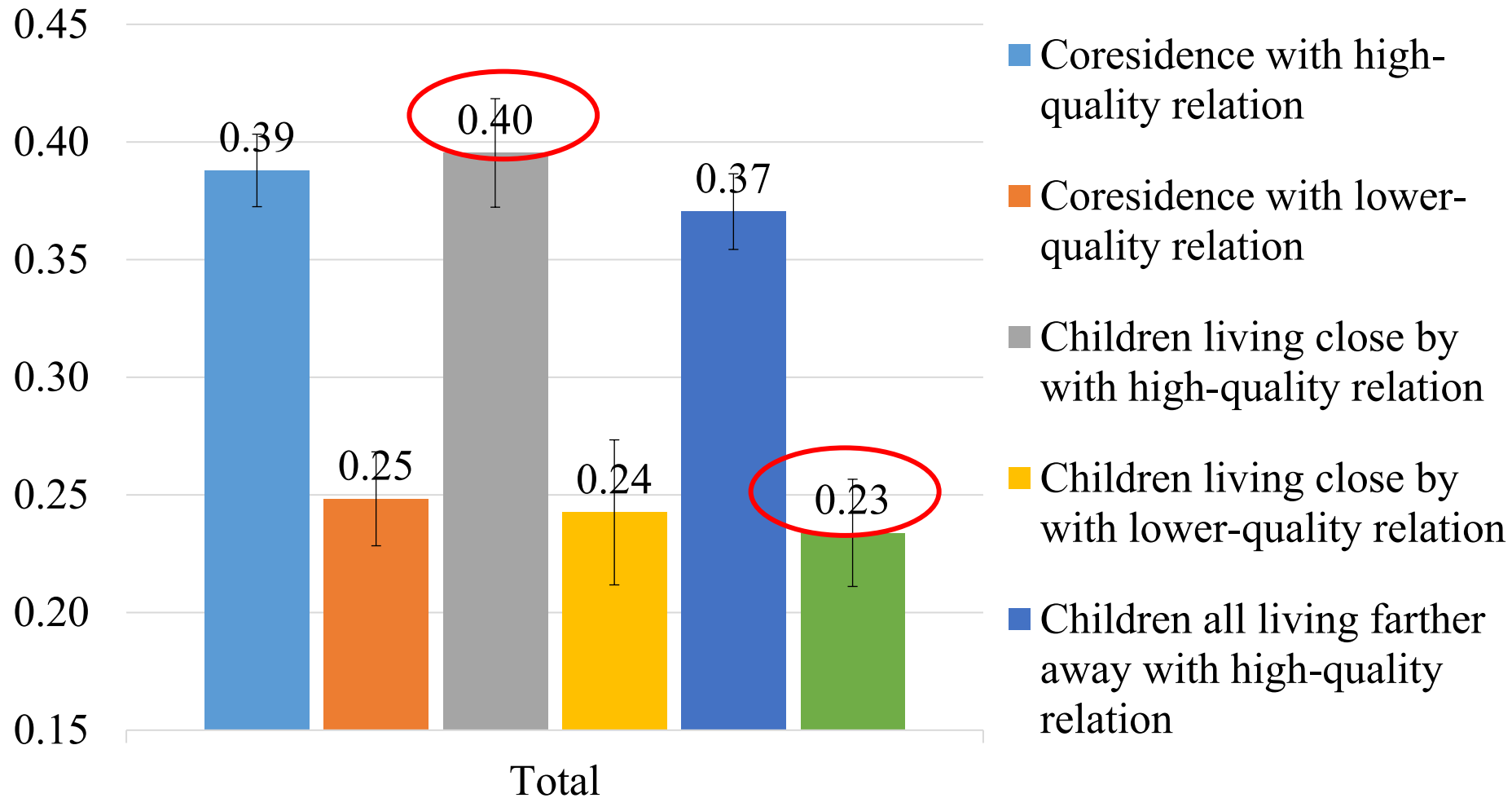
Zhang, Lin, Chen 2022: Living alone, loneliness, social isolation as three forms of social disconnectedness



Chen et al. 2022: Proximity vs. Living arrangements

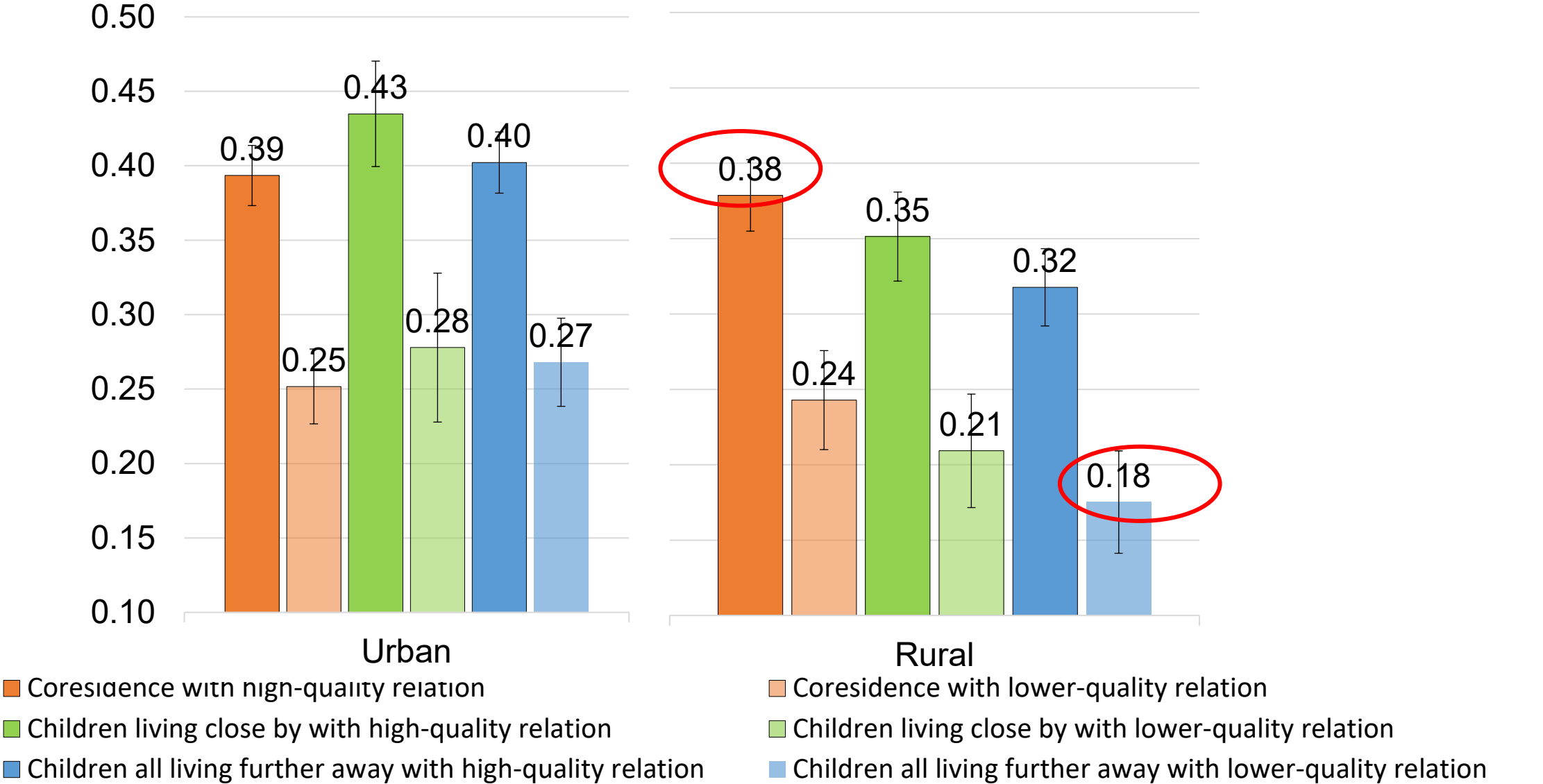


Chen et al. 2022: Proximity and Relationship Quality



Predicted probabilities of being "very satisfied"

Subsample analysis: Urban/Rural



Mixed findings-why and then what?

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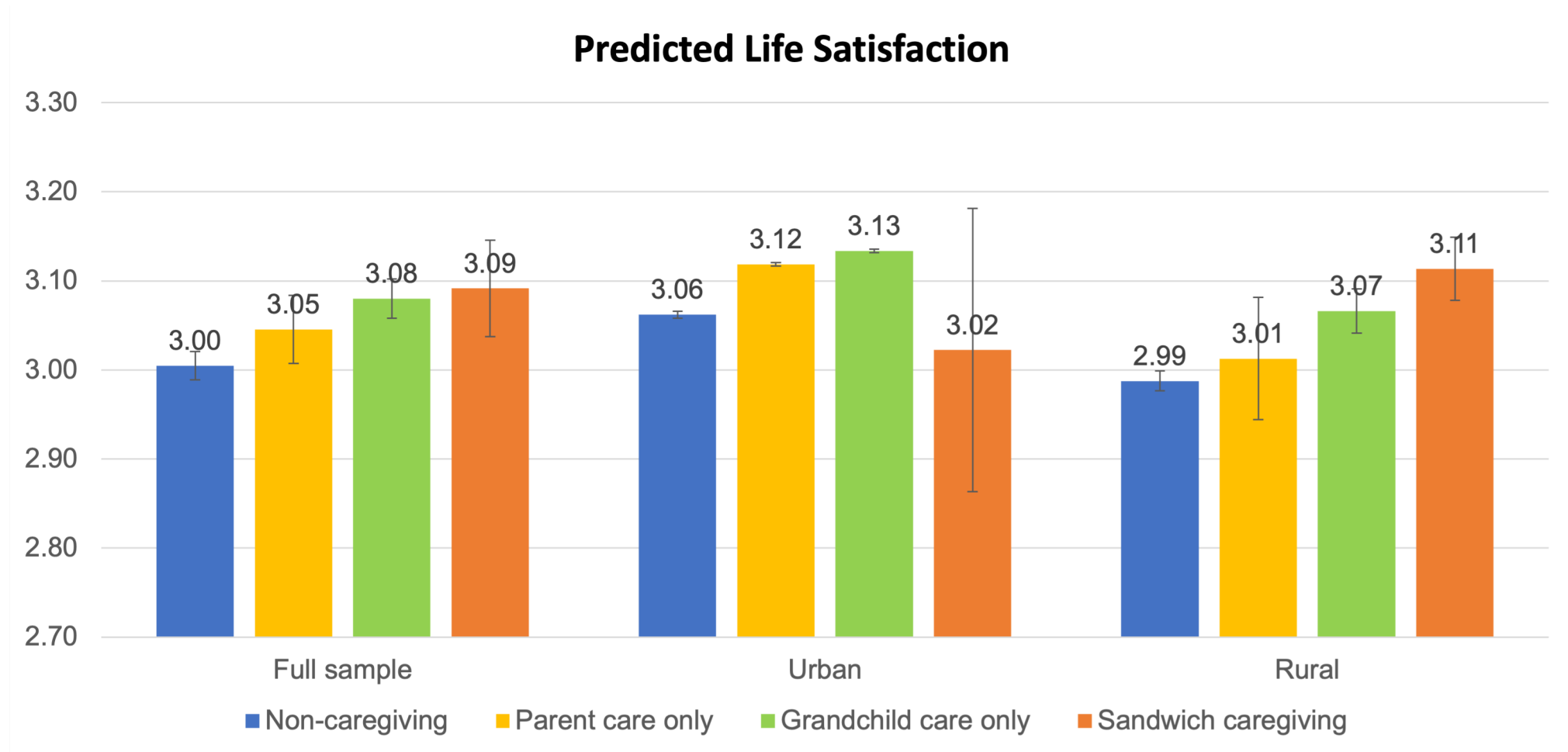
Beyond the living arrangements

- Other children (migrant children)
- Friendship and family ties
- Living alone ≠ Loneliness
- Proximity (A bowl of soup's distance vs. under the same roof)

Heterogeneity among extended families

- within-family dynamic (quality of relationship)
- Caregiving recipient vs. caregiver

Liu and Chen 2021: Older adults as intergenerational caregivers



Lessons Learned from China and Implications for Other LMICs

Intergenerational ties have become ever more important in the 21st century.

- renewed “intergenerational contract”

“Family Uncertainty Principle” (Seltzer 2019)

- “Family-as-units” vs. “Family-as-relationship”

Filial obligations persist but the caring capacity of the family cannot be assumed.

- Social embeddedness

The development of social policies promoting social connectedness, social security, health insurance, long-term care strategies is crucial to the maintenance of a strong family support system for a rapidly aging society.

Promising new directions

Grandparent-grandchild relationship as an important source of older age support

Parent-child dyadic analysis to further explore the linked lives

Time-use diary data to capture detailed activities

Data collection starting before mid and later life: leverage existing longitudinal data that are not aging surveys