

Is It About Who You Know? The Role of Social Capital on Re-employability of Older Women in Urban China

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Abstract

Evidence concerning the impact of the social capital of older women on labor market outcomes is complex. This article aims to examine and demonstrate the effect of social capital on the re-employability of older retired women in urban China and to reveal the process of accessing their re-employment position via social capital. This paper seizes data from a self-reported survey conducted in four major cities of Fujian province in China among women who are fully retired or re-employed and aged from 55 to 75. The results show that social capital is still the principal method for older women to access the workforce post-retirement. Individuals' weak ties significantly improve the re-employment possibilities of older retired women. However, the results also indicate that using social capital, especially blood capital, as solid ties do not ensure the quality of re-employment for older women, which means the benefits, wages, and labor rights of re-employment jobs are not guaranteed.

Keywords: *Social Capital, Older Women, Re-Employment, Employability, Job-Searching, Urban, China.*

Introduction

Using personal contacts to find jobs is a centuries-old social phenomenon, and this specific job-searching method is not limited to any class, age group, or occupation (Sharone, 2014). Starting with Mark Granovetter's groundbreaking work, *The Strength of Weak Ties* (1973, 1974/1995), more and more scholars have focused on and further explored how social capital embedded in different social networks can facilitate individuals in their job-searching process. Granovetter's theory claimed that weak ties are more effective than solid ties in the job-searching process since weak ties consist of more non-homogeneous networks and can provide job seekers with more diverse and non-redundant information about job vacancies (Granovetter, 1973, 1974/1995). This theory has been validated in several studies. For example, an empirical study in Sweden, Iran, and Yugoslavia demonstrates that an increase in weak ties in social networks significantly reduces inequality and increases employment possibilities for the youth (Hällsten et al., 2017). Varekamp et al. (2015) also suggested that individuals with more social capital, status-related social resources, and advice in finding jobs notably showed more activity in job-searching. However, there are differences in access to social capital, such as gender and ethnic differences.

However, social scientists' views differ on the effects of different social capital on individual employees. Many scholars have pointed out that there are cross-national differences in the use and effectiveness of social capital due to differences in culture, tradition, and institutional conditions. They argued that most existing studies on the effectiveness of weak ties are set in Western cultural contexts and individualism. In contrast, the cultural influences of the East, characterized by collectivism, need to be adequately considered (Sharone, 2014). In China, the institutional context of state socialism (although the role of weak ties is increasing in a market-oriented system with the transformation of the market economy), the role of solid ties does not diminish, especially in recruitment and job search in the state sector (Bian et al., 2015; Lin & Tian, 2016; Liu, 2017; Obukhova & Zhang, 2017).

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Notably, the effectiveness and role of social capital vary not only due to institutional differences but also significantly from gender and age. According to the principle of homogeneity (McPherson et al., 2001), people inherently tend to or prefer to associate with similar people. Thus, it is difficult for minority groups, including women, ethnic minorities, and older people, to access or share labor market information, job-related resources, and opportunities with the majority (e.g., men and young adults). Since job information is not randomly distributed but highly dependent on one's social network position or ability to access social capital, disadvantaged social networks of minority groups, such as women and older people, can further exacerbate their economic and employment inequalities and finally generate adverse labor market outcomes (Rosales, 2014; Wang et al., 2015; Liu, 2017; Kim, 2018).

The few existing studies and literature have concentrated on the impact and role of social capital of those disadvantaged minority groups (e.g., women, ethnic and older people, etc.) on their labor force participation. For example, a quantitative study on the relationship between using personal social capital in job-searching and monthly earnings among immigrant women in Korea suggested that using personal social capital, both weak and strong ties, is associated with lower-quality employment and lower monthly income (Kim, 2018). Another more recent mixed study confirms that although older people make greater use of solid connections for re-employment, their social networks tend to be shallower and narrower than those of younger professionals, which results in the quality of their re-employment often being poor as well (Gayen et al., 2019).

While the importance of personal social capital for employment and labor force participation is well discussed and widely documented, there is a paucity of studies on the links among personal social capital, the job-searching process, and re-employment outcomes for older retired women, as a minority disadvantaged group. This gap encourages the authors to examine this phenomenon in detail. Specifically, this study explores the nature of social capital urban retired older women used when undertaking job search after retirement. Secondly, this study identifies which network features are more likely to help retired older women succeed in re-entering the workforce and evaluate the operational mechanisms for mobilizing social capital for re-employment. Finally, the paper aims to assess the quality of re-employment jobs generated by personal social networks for older retired women. Data of this paper was derived from a quantitative study about the re-employment status of older retired women aged 55 to 75 in four cities in Fujian Province, China. Meanwhile, comparing the characteristics of the social capital of re-employed older women with fully retired older women was made to understand further the effectiveness and role of social capital in social networks in their job search and re-employment process. The outcomes of this study are essential for exploring the changing social networks of older urban women in contemporary society, understanding their social needs after retirement in old age, and further preventing the gradual social marginalization of older women due to their gender and age characteristics.

Literature Review

Social Capital

As Bourdieu (1983) elaborates, social capital is "*a collection of actual or potential resources, meaning that social capital is a social network that is recognized by the members of the network and is linked to a system that regulates the behavior of members*" (Bourdieu, 1983, pp.44-46). Based on this definition, social theorists further explain social capital as a social resource, including information, influence, social credentials, reinforcement, and material resources, embedded in a social network (Lin, 2001; Bian et al., 2012; DiTomaso & Bian, 2017; Zhang et al., 2021). Furthermore, social connections or social networks are assumed to involve valuable exchanges for each member of the network, and such reciprocal exchanges can be manipulated by emotional and moral responsibilities (Chen & Volker, 2016; DiTomaso, 2013; Burt & Burzynska, 2017).

Social capital is latent until activated and inert unless mobilized in purposed action (Hallsten et al., 2015). Moreover, job-searching is an activity that requires the involvement of members in one's social network or circle of social activities (Kim, 2019). Thus, in the job search process, potential access to social capital differs from successful mobilization or activation to success in obtaining employment positions. A growing body

of literature has recently been based on the correlation between social networks and job search. As Granovetter (1973) originally articulated for the advantage of weak ties, the common thread of modern empirical studies is to validate the advantage and importance of social capital, which means having the right relationships or knowing the correct individuals leads to labor market advantages such as higher earnings, job satisfaction and career prestige (Trimble & Kmec, 2011; Oesch & von Ow, 2017).

While there is substantial evidence of positive outcomes for individuals in terms of access to relevant recruitment information, employment opportunities, and financial rewards under the mechanisms of social capital use (McDonald, 2015; Dustmann et al., 2016; Greenberg & Fernandez, 2016; Gee et al., 2017), it can also have adverse effects based on different cultural contexts, population structures and institutional configurations (Tan et al., 2015; Huang & Gamble, 2015; Bian et al., 2015; Inkpen & Tsang, 2016). For example, a comparative study in the U.S., China, and Taiwan found that Chinese women could not use weak ties in their job search to increase their chances of obtaining higher-status jobs, such as executive positions (Chen, 2013). Similarly, other empirical studies confirm that a cohesive network is not conducive to women's job access. Instead, women's social networks mostly need more colleagues and authorities to provide job information (Lutter, 2015; Tian & Liu, 2018).

Social Capital in Chinese Society

Social networks are institutionally and culturally driven (Zhang et al., 2021). Unlike the individualistic culture of the West, collectivism is rooted in Chinese culture and institutions. Chinese people are collectivistic, interdependent, and embedded in solid relationships that shape their behavior and act as group members sharing mutual obligations (DiTomaso & Bian, 2017). '*Guanxi*' as a deep-seated idiosyncratic Chinese concept, is closely related to the Western concept of social capital and operates as a non-financial resource in social relations. As a result, China is associated with a unique type of network-based social capital: dense, strong ties accompanied by spare weak ties (Zhang et al., 2021).

'*Guanxi*' is a fundamental motivation for individuals to build social networks in Chinese society and a vital work value in the labor market and workplace (Le et al., 2020), especially the combination of '*Guanxi*' as relational social capital and networks formed based on relationships/ ties, as structural social capital, allows individuals to achieve better position and higher income in China. Moreover, in the Chinese cultural system, '*Guanxi*' significantly impacts organizations and employees. Employees can bring their social and family networks and resources, which they have built up over their life courses, into organizations or see the organization as an integral approach to developing and expanding their networks and social resources (Liu et al., 2015). Meanwhile, this intricate network of relationships not only makes the boundaries between work and family life spheres relatively blurred in the Chinese workplace but also profoundly impacts the actual recruitment and promotion practices in the workplace (Le et al., 2020).

However, the strength of ties works differently in China and the West. In China, people are more reliant on close and strong relationships. They depend more on reciprocal interactions and long-term trustworthy relationships, which means obtaining the resources and information needed, such as job-hunting information, is more readily achieved through strong ties with high trust than weak ties (DiTomaso & Bian, 2017; Zhang et al., 2021). Although, as an emerging economy in transition, China has experienced rather dramatic institutional transitions to gradually weaken the role of social capital and increase labor market efficiency (Huang, 2017; Pan & Tian, 2020), Chinese society is still in a remarkable period where cultural traditions and market economy transition are intertwined. Therefore, social capital's impact on the transition of Chinese society is still prominent (Bian, 2015; Zhao et al., 2022).

Based on the above literature, as an informal social institution, social capital in China can fill the gap in the labor market system and positively contribute to the re-employment of older workers. However, social capital's quality, network structure, and size differ significantly between older women and men (Zhang et al., 2017; Xu, 2017). As a result, further research and evidence on the role of social capital in older men's and women's job-hunting are needed.

Social Capital, Gender, And Employment Prospect

Due to the difference in structure and composition of networks based on gender, women, especially after marriage and childbearing, have more relationships with relatives and less contact with non-relatives (Liu, 2017; Shui et al., 2021). Several studies report that gender differences significantly influence social capital on employment prospects, which makes social capital a weaker resource for women (Huang et al., 2019; Bolibar, 2020). Furthermore, women use expressive behavior when acquiring and utilizing social capital to extend social resources from family relationships and friendships. However, it does not lead to more effective social resources than instrumental behavior. Particularly in women's careers, the social relationships they develop (e.g., peers, colleagues, and supervisors) act more as mentors, providing women with moral support rather than career development (Górska et al., 2021).

Empirical studies in the Asian area, including China, also validate gender differences in the structure and use of social capital. In general, women have been identified as a disadvantaged group that needs more helpful social resources embedded in the networks (Son & Lin, 2012; Fung, 2020). For example, a quantitative study in Singapore compared the network patterns between men and women. The results prove that men are more likely to connect to men, non-kin, and have weaker ties related to primary sources of job information than women (Chua, 2013).

Another study in China suggests that gender inequalities in the use of social capital resulted in women facing more barriers than men in mobilizing social networks for career purposes (Tian & Liu, 2017). They point out that although women may obtain job-related information from solid ties, such as acquaintances, the fact that women employees are more likely to have their abilities devalued ultimately causes the use of social capital not to produce positive outcomes for their job-hunting.

Finally, due to gender homogeneity in social networks, dominant men prefer to share information, resources, and opportunities about the labor market within the male population. On the other hand, women end up only knowing about jobs held by women, which are often lower-ranking and lower-paid (Kim, 2019; Fung, 2020). This gendered segregation of social networks not only exacerbates gender inequality in the job search process (He & Wu, 2021; Wu, 2019) but also reinforces women's lower job satisfaction (Huang & Gamble, 2015; Xiong et al., 2017). Previous studies in China have shown that, in general, men report higher levels of job satisfaction than women in China due to significant gender inequality (Xiong et al., 2017). Another empirical data set of 1800 Chinese employees found that women in China's retail sectors are less satisfied with their jobs than men (Hunag & Gamble, 2015).

Social Capital Theory

Sociologists (e.g., Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1990) have interpreted social capital concepts and theory from different perspectives. This study draws on the social capital concept and theory summarized by Lin Nan (2001) from the standpoint of individual behavior. *Social capital* is a concept rooted in social networks and relationships. It consists of three elements: resources embedded in social structures, an individual's access to such resources, and their ability to use or mobilize such social resources in purposeful action (Lin, 1999). Based on this concept, the social capital theory (Lin, 2001) has proposed explicitly that it is an investment by individuals to access and use social resources embedded in social relationships to achieve a better socio-economic status. Thus, considering the social resource characteristics of older women and the structure of their social networks, retired older women are more likely to access re-employment opportunities through social capital. However, due to the constitutive limitations of older women's social capital, retired older women rarely have access to higher-quality jobs based on their social capital. Based on the notion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Compared to fully retired older women, urban re-employed or self-employed older women have richer and broader social capital embedded in their social networks.

H2: The probability of finding jobs through social capital, including strong and weak ties, relative to formal job-searching methods (e.g., newspaper, official website, and social media platforms) increases.

H3: Strong ties rather than weak ties are used more often to find a re-employment job in the market for urban retired older women in China.

H4: The quality of re-employment jobs obtained through social capital is lower than that obtained via formal job-searching channels.

Methods

Study Area and Data Sources

The data for the present study were gathered through a field survey of retired urban women aged 55 to 75 in four major cities in Fujian Province, China, from July to November 2022. This investigation, conducted with a closed-ended question questionnaire, focuses on the re-employment condition of urban retired older women, their job-searching methods and process, and the role of social capital in their re-employment. Investigation samples were determined by combining stratified sampling and random sampling. City samples were selected based on Fujian Province, China's Gross Domestic Product output. Among the nine prefecture-level cities in Fujian Province, the top four cities in terms of GDP were selected: Quanzhou City, Fuzhou City, Xiamen City, and Zhangzhou City. In addition, questionnaires were randomly administered in equal numbers to each city's administrative districts and local senior universities (the community colleges specifically for retired older cadres). Finally, a total of 400 questionnaires were collected, of which 130 were collected in Quanzhou City, 120 in Fuzhou City, 90 in Xiamen City, and 60 in Zhangzhou City.

The Sample

The target population of this study is urban retired older women. Given that China's current statutory retirement system is aimed at urban residents, there is no such thing as retirement for them. Therefore, urban women aged 55 to 75 were chosen as the study sample to reduce data deficiencies and measurement errors. As the current retirement age of women in China is 55 years, this study respondents' lower age limit was 55 years. Also, the upper age limit for the study respondents was set at 75 years old, taking factors such as average life expectancy and health conditions into account. In addition, this study's respondents should be formal employees or self-employed with contributions to the National Social Security Fund before retiring since farmers, freelancers, and the state's compulsory retirement policy does not bind part-time workers.

Data Collection and Data Analysis Technique

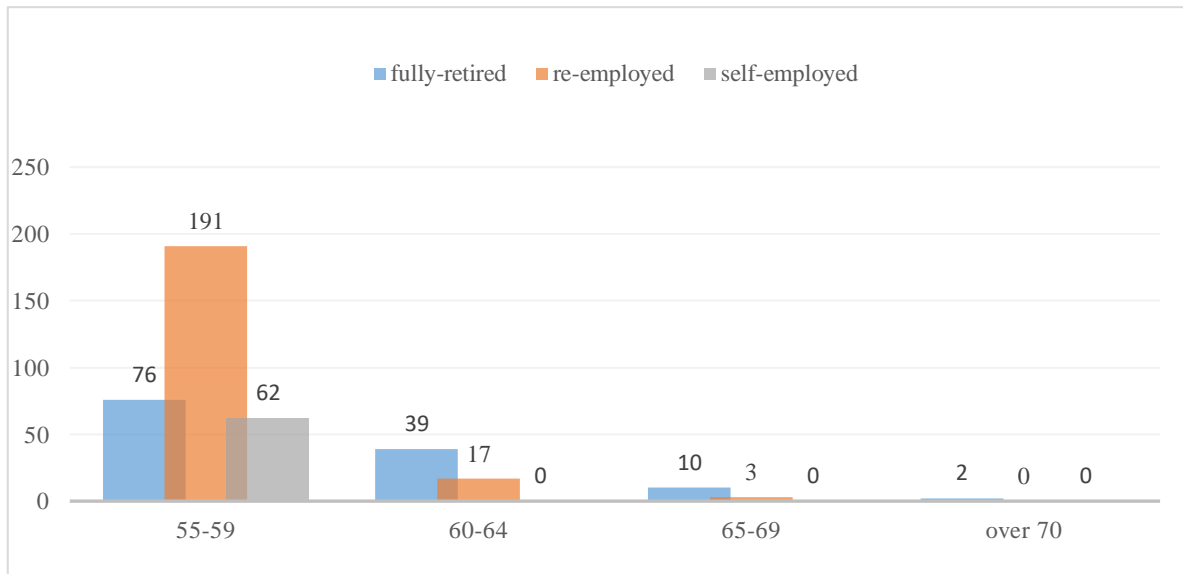
As this study used a quantitative analysis method, a closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire consists of three main sections. The first section collects basic information about the sample participants, including their age, physical health condition, pension incomes, educational level, and marital status. The second section investigates the characteristics of family members, including the employment status of spouses and the marriage and employment status of their adult children. Finally, the third section of the questionnaire deals with the social networks and social capital reserves of the respondent group (i.e., whether social networks and social capital are used to obtain re-employment positions, whether other official channels are used to obtain re-employment information, the type of the re-employment and the salary and benefits of re-employment positions). Most questionnaire items for this study used Likert-like items based on a scale from “a minimal extent” to “a very great extent.” Most of the questions were based on the existing sections of the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) 2018, particularly data on basic family information, work, and retirement. Other questions asked for information, such as pension income, monthly salary, spouse ages, children's numbers, and educational level. This study aims to compare and examine differences in social networks. Social resources are used among older women with different re-employment statuses to better understand and analyze the re-employment patterns of older women after retirement. Thus, the study used SPSS 27.0 statistical analysis software to conduct descriptive and correlation analyses of the data to examine the social network composition differences of older women and the use of their social resources in the job search process.

Results

Re-Employment Status of Urban Older Women

Among 400 urban older women respondents, there are 127 fully retired, 211 re-employed, and 62 self-employed, at 31.8 percent, 52.8 percent, and 15.5 percent, respectively. The proportion of older women who are re-employed or self-employed post-retirement decreases significantly with age, particularly as the self-employed older women are all concentrated in the age group of 55 to 59 years old (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Age Level with Re-Employment Status



Note: N=400

In terms of re-employment jobs, the result reveals that re-employment of older women is concentrated in specific industries and positions, with the most significant proportion being in the category of workers in business and services, at 52.7 percent, followed by self-employed workers, at 22.7 percent and professionals and technicians at 15 percent. Moreover, for older self-employed women, most businesses are also subordinate to the business and service sectors. Meanwhile, data shows that the diversity of re-employment jobs for older women decreases significantly. Finally, it is worth noting that, although the proportion of re-employed professionals and technicians also declines with age, the proportion of professionals and technicians begins to outstrip all other types of re-employment jobs from the 60 to 64 age group, which means that older re-employed women working as professionals and technicians have the longest career life expectancy (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Re-employment Jobs in Different Age Groups

Note: N=273 (not including fully retired respondents)

Social Capital of Urban Older Women

From the social capital perspective, Table 1 demonstrates the difference in social capital among re-employed, self-employed (including freelancer independent worker) urban older women and fully retired urban older women. Overall, the fully retired, re-employed and self-employed groups have a relatively low social capital scale. In contrast, the re-employed and self-employed older women respondents have a relatively more affluent number and variety of social capital than the fully retired group. As tested by One-way ANOVA, the group of re-employed and self-employed older women respondents differed significantly from the group of fully retired older women only in weak ties, the amount of Geo-related capital and WeChat groups capital, in particular. Second, regarding the closeness of ties to different social capitals, the three groups of older women respondents with different re-employment statuses differ significantly only in the closeness of ties to blood capitals (as solid ties). These results are partially consistent with our hypothesis 1 (H1).

Based on the results, fully retired older women have a slightly higher closeness of ties to blood-related capital than older women who re-enter the labor workforce as re-employed or self-employed workers. The results on the size and closeness of social capital of older retired women in different employment statuses confirm that active employment status has a positive effect on the accumulation and use of social capital of older retired women. However, the closeness of strong ties, such as blood-related capital, has a relatively negative effect on the employment of older women.

Table 1 One-way ANOVA Analysis on Respondent's Socio-Demographic Profiles

IV	Groups	Mean	SD	95% CI	F
Number of blood capitals	Fully retired (N=127)	2.39	0.80	(2.25, 2.53)	0.992
	Re-employed (N=211)	2.29	0.65	(2.21, 2.38)	
	Self-employed (N=62)	2.27	0.63	(2.11, 2.43)	
Number of work-related capitals	Fully retired (N=127)	2.22	0.78	(2.08, 2.36)	1.907
	Re-employed (N=211)	2.70	2.96	(2.30, 3.10)	

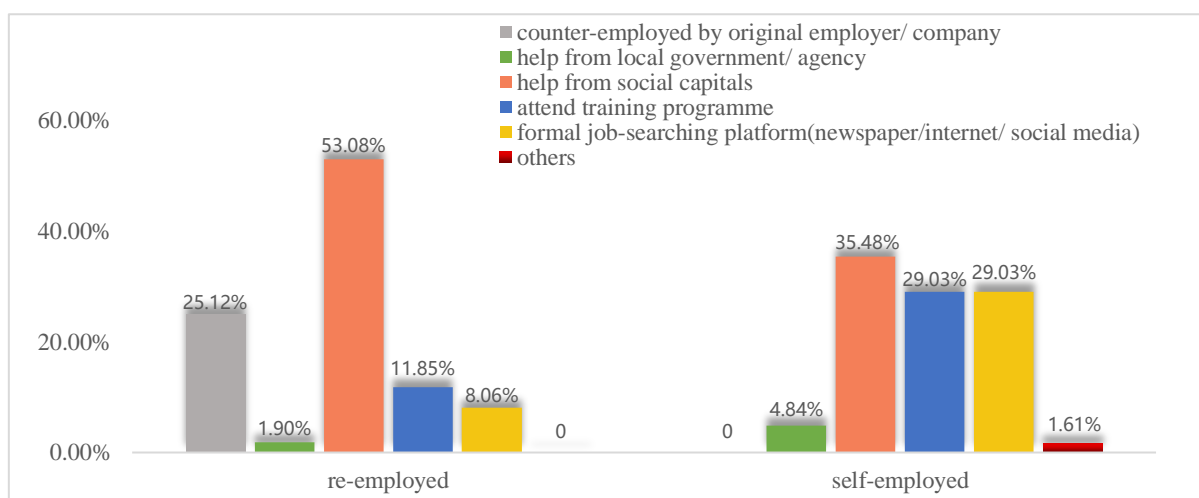
	Self-employed (N=62)	2.45	0.64	(2.29, 2.62)	
Number of Geo-related capital	Fully retired (N=127)	2.42	0.76	(2.28, 2.55)	4.040*
	Re-employed (N=211)	2.64	0.74	(2.54, 2.74)	
	Self-employed (N=62)	2.63	0.66	(2.46, 2.79)	
Number of WeChat groups capital	Fully retired (N=127)	1.88	0.79	(1.74, 2.02)	30.417***
	Re-employed (N=211)	2.37	0.73	(2.27, 2.47)	
	Self-employed (N=62)	2.77	0.89	(2.55, 3.00)	
Relation with blood capital	Fully retired (N=127)	3.52	0.69	(3.40, 3.64)	3.937*
	Re-employed (N=211)	3.34	0.54	(3.26, 3.41)	
	Self-employed (N=62)	3.37	0.52	(3.24, 3.50)	
Relation with work-related capital	Fully retired (N=127)	2.94	0.52	(2.85, 3.04)	0.243
	Re-employed (N=211)	2.98	0.47	(2.92, 3.04)	
	Self-employed (N=62)	2.95	0.49	(2.83, 3.08)	
Relation with Geo-related capital	Fully retired (N=127)	3.17	0.63	(3.06, 3.28)	0.164
	Re-employed (N=211)	3.16	0.49	(3.10, 3.23)	
	Self-employed (N=62)	3.21	0.41	(3.11, 3.31)	
Relation with WeChat groups capital	Fully retired (N=127)	2.80	0.66	(2.83, 2.97)	1.345
	Re-employed (N=211)	2.90	0.53	(2.71, 2.93)	
	Self-employed (N=62)	2.82	0.43	(2.80, 2.91)	

P<0.05=*, P<0.01=**, P<0.001***

Job Search Methods

In Figure 3, the results show that more than half of the re-employed urban older women, at 53.08 percent, have successfully re-entered the labor market through their social capital, which means that the majority of older retired women still rely on social networking to access job openings and re-employment positions. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that rehiring back to their previous employers (mainly older women who used to work in government departments, public institutions, and state-owned enterprises) and participating in training programs are also essential channels for re-employed older women respondents, at 25.12 percent and 11.85 percent respectively. In addition, only about 8 per cent of older female respondents found jobs via formal recruitment platforms, such as newspapers, social media platforms and official websites. Finally, less than 2 per cent of older retired women re-entered the labor market by obtaining help from local governments and public agencies, which implies that the public sector does not play the role it should in organizing and facilitating services for older people's re-employment recently.

Figure 3 Re-Employment Type and Job-Searching Methods



Note: n=273; Re-employed (n=211); Self-employed older women respondents (n=62)

In addition, there are significant differences in how retired older women respondents seek jobs in different types of re-employment. Overall, self-employed older retired women used a more even share of re-employment channels. Although the help of social capital was also the key to their successful self-employment, a significant proportion of them also relied on participation in job skills training programs and traditional formal channels, such as newspapers, social media, and official websites, for business and self-employment opportunities. According to data shown in Figure 3, among self-employed older women, the use of formal traditional channels of employment is the same as participation in vocational skills training programs, which is about 19 per cent. In contrast, the use of social capital is higher, at 35.5 per cent. Less than 5 per cent of the self-employed older women indicated they had received help from local government authorities and public service agencies.

When comparing and analyzing the data in conjunction with Figures 3 and 4, it is easy to see that there is a significant difference in the role of different channels of job search and successful re-employment or self-employment for older retired women to achieve different re-employment types. Among them, for self-employed older women, the employment help received from social capital is mainly in the form of financial assistance or provision and recommendation of business resources, which accounts for 14.6 per cent. For the re-employed older women, direct recommendation of jobs, which accounts for 60.4 per cent, is the most frequently used. The most used direct position recommendation suggests that most of those specific re-employment jobs might be low-quality and replaceable and do not need to go through the formal recruitment process, which also implies that the process of older women's use of their social capital for re-employment is a form of social inequity and manifestation of unequal distribution of labor market resources. Therefore, hypothesis 2 (H2) of this study was partially confirmed because although the percentage of re-employed and self-employed older female respondents who used social resources for successful employment was the highest, self-employed older women relied relatively less on social capital.

Figure 4 Specific Help from Social Capitals in Job-Searching



Note: n=273; Re-employed (n=211); Self-employed older women respondents (n=62)

In addition, the results of data based on the multinomial logistic regression analysis in Table 2 show that among all older women respondents re-entering the labour market after their retirement, the size and

closeness of different social capitals can have different effects on the possibilities of re-entering the labour market after retirement and the choice of a different mode of re-employment. Specifically, the data show that an increase in the size of blood capital significantly reduces the likelihood of older retired women choosing to re-enter the labour market regardless of re-employment or self-employment (including freelance and independent work) and that not only this but also that closer one is to the blood capital, the less likely it is that older women re-enter the labour market (but not for self-employed older women). On the contrary, an increase in the size of work-related social capital and WeChat group capital has a significant facilitating effect on older women's re-employment and self-employment. This result is a refutation of Hypothesis 3 (H3) of this study, implying that increasing the number and intimacy of solid ties cannot foster re-employment or self-employment. In contrast, an increase in weak ties can increase the likelihood of re-employment among older retired women.

Table 2 The Social Capital's Triggers on Re-Employment

Groups	IV	B	Sig. (P)	Exp(B)	95%CI
Re-employed (n=211)	Number of Blood Capital	-0.681	0.002**	0.506	(0.330, 0.776)
	Number of Co-worker Capital	0.692	0.005**	1.998	(1.229, 3.248)
	Number of Friendship-related Capital	-0.096	0.697	0.909	(0.561, 1.471)
	Number of WeChat Groups Capital	0.726	<0.001***	2.067	(1.447, 2.953)
	Relation with Blood Capital	-0.561	0.017**	0.571	(0.361, 0.903)
	Relation with Co-worker Capital	0.177	0.591	1.194	(0.625, 2.281)
	Relation with Friendship-related Capital	-0.091	0.744	0.913	(0.528, 1.578)
	Relation with WeChat Groups Capital	0.417	0.164	1.517	(0.844, 2.727)
Self-employed (n=62)	Number of Blood Capital	-0.731	0.025**	0.481	(0.254, 0.914)
	Number of WeChat Groups Capital	1.559	<0.001***	4.752	(2.904, 7.776)
	Number of Work-related Capital	0.386	0.271	1.471	(0.739, 2.928)
	Number of Friendship-related Capital	-0.337	0.315	0.714	(0.370, 1.378)
	Relation with Blood-related Capital	-0.425	0.190	0.654	(0.346, 1.234)
	Relation with Co-worker Capital	0.322	0.477	1.380	(0.568, 3.356)
	Relation with Friendship-related Capital	0.252	0.500	1.287	(0.618, 2.676)
	Relation with WeChat Groups Capital	-1.00	0.808	0.904	(0.403, 2.032)

Note: a. the reference category is fully retired.

b. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

c. $P < 0.05 = *$; $P < 0.01 = **$; $P < 0.001 = ***$

Finally, it is worth noting that when further independent T-tests were conducted to analyze the different social capitals providing help to older women who were re-employed and self-employed, only the help provided by work-related social capital was found to be significantly different. This finding likewise affirms

the facilitating role of weak ties in helping older retired women successfully re-enter the workforce. Additionally, based on the finding of this differential result, it may imply, to some extent, that there are differences in social capital accumulation between older women who choose to be self-employed (including freelance and independent work) and those who are re-employed.

Table 3 Independent T-test on Different Type of Social Capital Use

IV	Groups	Mean	SD	t	F
Help with WeChat Interest Capital	Re-employed (N=211)	0.09	0.280	-1.220	7.250
	Self-employed (N=62)	0.15	0.355		
Help with Geo-related Capital	Re-employed (N=211)	0.38	0.487	2.136	23.675
	Self-employed (N=62)	0.24	0.432		
Help with Work-related Capital	Re-employed (N=211)	0.36	0.483	3.534	65.187***
	Self-employed (N=62)	0.16	0.371		
Help with Blood Capital	Re-employed (N=211)	0.12	0.324	0.472	0.922
	Self-employed (N=62)	0.10	0.298		

P<0.05=*, P<0.01=**, P<0.001***

Quality Of Re-Employment

From the perspective of re-employment job satisfaction, this study used an independent T-test to examine different dimensions of older retired women's job satisfaction in re-employment occupations to assess the quality of their re-employment further. Job satisfaction was categorized into five dimensions, including monthly income, professional reputation, employment benefits, work intensity and workload pressure. According to the results of data in Table 4, there are significant differences in the ratings of job satisfaction between re-employed older women and self-employed older women in terms of income, professional reputation, benefits, and work intensity, except for no significant difference based on workload pressure. Overall, although the average level of job satisfaction for both re-employed and self-employed older women is below average, self-employed older women seem to be more satisfied with their careers than re-employment older women, which may imply that older re-employed women experience more frustration and unfair treatment in traditional workforce and work environments (putting them in a more vulnerable position).

However, the data results fall short of the hypothesis of this article in terms of whether social capital is used for successful re-employment opportunities. Although, on average, older women who did not use social capital to successfully gain re-employment all had higher employment satisfaction than older women who used social capital. At the same time, this difference in job satisfaction was only statistically significant regarding satisfaction with work intensity and workload pressure. Therefore, combining the findings in Tables 4 and 5, Hypothesis 4 (H4) in this study is partially confirmed.

Table 4 Independent T-test on Re-employment Job Satisfaction

IV	Groups	Mean	SD	t	F
Income satisfaction	Re-employed (N=211)	2.66	0.61	-2.493	14.458*
	Self-employed (N=62)	2.85	0.51		
Professional reputation	Re-employed (N=211)	2.13	0.79	-3.166	0.215**
	Self-employed (N=62)	2.48	0.70		
Benefit satisfaction	Re-employed (N=211)	2.99	0.52	-2.032	0.498*
	Self-employed (N=62)	3.15	0.47		
Work intensity	Re-employed (N=211)	3.11	0.52	-2.206	2.979*
	Self-employed (N=62)	3.27	0.52		
Workload pressure	Re-employed (N=211)	2.92	0.61	-1.818	17.305
	Self-employed (N=62)	3.03	0.36		

P<0.05=*, P<0.01=**, P<0.001***

Table 5 Independent T-test on Re-employment Job Satisfaction with Social Capital Help

IV	Groups	Mean	SD	t	F
Income satisfaction	Re-employment without social capital help (N=138)	2.754	0.577	1.324	1.730
	Re-employment with social capital help (N=135)	2.659	0.601		
Professional reputation	Re-employment without social capital help (N=138)	2.297	0.796	1.820	3.851
	Re-employment with social capital help (N=135)	2.126	0.757		
Benefit satisfaction	Re-employment without social capital help (N=138)	3.073	0.549	1.406	3.041
	Re-employment with social capital help (N=135)	2.985	0.473		
Work intensity	Re-employment without social capital help (N=138)	3.232	0.531	2.766	7.561**
	Re-employment with social capital help (N=135)	3.059	0.500		
Workload pressure	Re-employment without social capital help (N=138)	3.022	0.547	2.293	4.781*
	Re-employment with social capital help (N=135)	2.867	0.570		

P<0.05=*, P<0.01=**, P<0.001***

Discussion and Recommendations

The above results on post-retirement job-searching behavior and re-employment of older women reveal the specific effects of personal social capital on the re-employment outcomes of older women. In general, personal social capital does increase older women's chances of success in re-employment. However, the use of personal social capital indeed harms the quality of re-employment jobs. First, there is a significant difference in the size coefficient of personal social capital for older women. It suggests that in urban China, older women who have successfully re-entered the labor workforce or started their business post-retirement have more available social capital, including more diverse and extensive social networks, such as work-related social contacts and online WeChat group contacts. This finding is consistent with the perspective of our theoretical model and H1.

Additionally, increased social capital enhances older women's social connections and fragile ties and significantly increases their probability of re-employment, which is partly consistent with our H2. More specifically, as older retired women are less educated and need more basic vocational skills, such as computer skills, to adapt to the current workforce, they can rarely access job offers and employment through formal job search channels. However, for self-employed older women, their employment channels are relatively more extensive and balanced, as nearly two-thirds of them become self-employed, freelancers or independent workers via vocational training and other formal job-searching channels, which partly reflects the importance of job skills for older retired women's re-entry into the labor market.

Second, the results show that while the use of personal social capital, whether solid ties or weak ties, significantly enhances the probability of re-employment for older women, contrary to our predictions in H3, older urban women proved to use weak ties more often to do a job search and successfully re-enter the workforce. Again, it is because China's labor market has been reformed. In cities where the market economy is the dominant force, job seekers and employers are more often matched directly through the market, so weak ties are more conducive to disseminating non-redundant information about job vacancies and helping

older job seekers identify suitable positions (DiTomaso & Bian, 2017; Tian & Lin, 2016).

Another plausible explanation is that the more significant and connected the blood-related capital, the less likely older urban women will be re-employed to the homogeneity of social capital and more traditional family care responsibilities. Instead, having significant blood-related capital and remaining close to it means that these older retired women are more likely to adhere to the household's traditional gendered division of labor, which is the male breadwinner and female family caregiver. Therefore, they are required to take on more family caregiving duties, whether voluntarily or involuntarily (Liu, 2017; Shui et al., 2021); while their blood-related capital is more considerable, the quality of their social capital is low and homogeneous (Kim, 2019; Fung, 2020), and does not provide older urban women with helpful information about job search or recruitment.

Social networks play a pivotal role in job search and re-employment for older people (Gonzales & Nowell, 2017; Pena-López & Sánchez-Santos, 2017; Sharabi & Simonovich, 2017). However, contrary to the traditional social capital argument, our current study shows that the use of social capital, regardless of strong and weak ties, is negatively associated with older urban women's re-employment outcomes. Specifically, although the overall quality of re-employment jobs for retired older women in urban China is relatively low, informal job search methods have adverse outcomes for older women's labor force participation results, such as work intensity, professional reputation, and labor income.

The findings in this study are also of interest to the broader society, specifically to inform women about the importance of building high-quality social capital to access employment. Furthermore, our study also has several implications for government policy. To promote equality in the labor market, local government policymakers and enterprises should set up community-based recruitment service platforms based on the social capital characteristics of older retired women, help older women who are willing and able to re-enter the workforce to access diversified job information and actively explore practical measures better to integrate older retired women into the modern labor market.

On the other hand, although personal social capital has been proven to increase re-employment opportunities, personal ability should be addressed to avoid unfair competition. Therefore, the state government must actively create grassroots aging learning programs and develop training courses suitable for retired older women to enhance their re-employability. For example, urban women can be provided with basic computer skills training to meet the basic requirements of modern administrative office systems and awarded a state-certified qualification diploma upon completion.

Conclusion

This study, however, has limitations. First, this study only focuses on four cities in Fujian, China, which limits these findings' generalizability. Future studies should consider including more regions and cities in China and other parts of the world. Second, the examination of the size of older women's social capital is only from an individual perspective and does not include the social capital of family members, including their spouses and adult children, for reference. The social capital of other family members may have different effects on re-employment outcomes for urban older women. Finally, the dependent variable in this study is limited to the individual re-employment outcomes of older women. However, using personal social capital may also lead to other households' economic and socio-economic outcomes. This study can provide a valuable reference for further exploration of older women's job-searching and re-employment process in urban China. In addition, further research should be conducted via a more deliberate model to obtain a more accurate effect of social capital.

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