

Practical Difficulties and Improvement Measures in the Construction of Community-Based Elderly Care Service Systems

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Abstract: With the acceleration of population aging in China, the community-based elderly care service system has become an important measure for responding to aging, and its development level is closely related to the quality of life of older adults and social harmony and stability. Using literature analysis, field investigation, and comparative analysis, this paper explores the existing problems and underlying causes in China's community-based elderly care service system. At present, the system faces several problems: service supply cannot effectively match the growing demand for elderly care, and service coverage remains limited; the degree of service specialization is relatively low, making it difficult to meet the diversified and personalized needs of older adults; funding input is insufficient, and the integration of government, market, and social resources remains inadequate; policy coordination is not smooth, and interdepartmental coordination and cooperation mechanisms are lacking. In response, this paper proposes measures such as improving top-level policy design, expanding fiscal investment channels, constructing a diversified financing model, strengthening the development of professional elderly care personnel, building a smart elderly care information platform, improving the industry supervision mechanism, and deepening the integrated development of medical care and elderly care. The study shows that improving the community-based elderly care service system requires adherence to government guidance, social participation, and market operation, as well as comprehensive reform at the institutional, technological, and service levels, so as to promote the long-term and sustainable development of community-based elderly care services.

Keywords: community-based elderly care; service system; population aging; improvement measures; sustainable development

1. Introduction

China is undergoing the largest and fastest process of population aging in the world. This has placed tremendous pressure on traditional elderly care models, making it urgent to establish a socialized elderly care service system that meets the requirements of the times. Community-based elderly care is a form of elderly care between family-based care and institutional care. Because of its convenience, low cost, and high acceptability among older adults, it has become one of the effective means of addressing population aging in China. At present, the construction of China's community-based elderly care service system is still in its initial stage, and problems such as prominent contradictions between supply and demand, low service quality, insufficient funding input, and inadequate policy coordination remain. According to data released by the Ministry of Civil Affairs in 2023, the coverage rate of community-based elderly care service facilities nationwide has exceeded 90%, but problems such as incomplete service functions and low professionalization remain prominent. Analyzing the manifestations, causes, and solutions of these problems is conducive to promoting the development and improvement of the community-based elderly care service system and better meeting the increasingly diversified elderly care needs of older adults.

2. Theoretical Basis and Development Status of the Community-Based Elderly Care Service System

2.1 Connotation and Characteristics of the Community-Based Elderly Care Service System

Community-based elderly care services rely on communities, take families as the basic unit, and use various resources inside and outside the community to provide comprehensive services for older adults, including daily care, medical and health care, psychological support, cultural activities, and recreation. These services have several characteristics. First, they are strongly locality-based, with service recipients mainly being residents of the community, making it convenient for older adults to receive services nearby. Second, they are highly comprehensive, covering daily living services, health services, psychological services, and other aspects, thereby meeting the diversified needs of older adults. Third, they are strongly social in nature, emphasizing cooperation among the government, market, social organizations, families, and other forces to jointly promote the development of elderly care services.

2.2 Analysis of Development Models of Community-Based Elderly Care Service Systems Abroad

Major developed countries began constructing community-based elderly care service systems relatively early and have formed development models with their

own characteristics. The United Kingdom implements an “aging in place” model based on community care. Under government guidance, social service departments organize and manage services in a unified manner, providing older adults with comprehensive services from the family to the community. In 2022, the coverage rate of community-based elderly care services exceeded 95%. Japan has established a community-based integrated care system based on the long-term care insurance system. The “community-based integrated care system” combines five elements: medical care, long-term care, prevention, housing, and daily living support, thereby achieving standardized and professionalized service supply. The United States adopts a market-oriented community-based elderly care service model. The government is mainly responsible for formulating relevant policies and conducting supervision, while encouraging private enterprises and nonprofit organizations to provide services through tax reductions, subsidies, and other measures, forming a diversified service supply pattern.

2.3 Development Process of China’s Community-Based Elderly Care Service System

The construction of China’s community-based elderly care service system has gone through a process from nonexistence to establishment and from simplicity to complexity. Around 2000, with the development of urban community construction, community-based elderly care services began to emerge, mainly in the form of community day care and simple daily living services. Since 2010, the state has issued a series of policy documents to promote the standardized and professionalized development of community-based elderly care services, and the construction of facilities such as community day care centers for older adults and community elderly care service stations has accelerated significantly. From 2019 to 2023, under the guidance of important policies such as the Opinions on Promoting the Development of Elderly Care Services, the construction of the community-based elderly care service system entered a period of rapid development. Service items became increasingly diversified, service levels continued to improve, and an elderly care service model based on the family, supported by the community, and supplemented by institutions was basically formed^[1].

3. Practical Difficulties Facing the Construction of China’s Community-Based Elderly Care Service System

3.1 Imbalanced Service Supply Structure and Unreasonable Resource Allocation

At present, the greatest problem in the construction

of China’s community-based elderly care service system is the structural contradiction between supply and demand. According to a 2023 survey by the China National Committee on Aging, in urban communities, community-based elderly care service facilities are relatively concentrated and service categories are relatively complete. However, in rural communities, the development of community-based elderly care services seriously lags behind, and approximately 40% of rural communities lack even the most basic elderly care service facilities. In addition, the content structure of service supply is unreasonable. Basic daily care services are relatively sufficient, but professional rehabilitation nursing, psychological support, cultural activities, recreation, and other services are seriously insufficient, making it difficult to meet the diversified needs of older adults. Regional imbalance in resource allocation is also a serious problem. The development level of community-based elderly care services in developed eastern regions is far higher than that in central and western regions, and the gap between urban and rural areas is also large. This unbalanced development further intensifies the contradiction between supply and demand in community-based elderly care services.

3.2 Lagging Development of Professional Personnel and Low Service Quality

The degree of professionalization in community-based elderly care services directly affects service quality, but the current development of professional personnel is far from meeting development needs. According to data from the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security in 2022, there were approximately 1.3 million elderly care service workers nationwide. However, based on the internationally commonly used ratio of 3:1 between older adults and caregivers, the shortage exceeded 5 million workers. Among these workers, fewer than 30% held relevant qualification certificates. Most service workers had not received formal professional training and lacked necessary service skills and service awareness. In addition, the problem of talent loss is very serious. Due to low income, low social status, limited development space, and other reasons, personnel turnover in the community-based elderly care service industry is very high, with an annual turnover rate exceeding 40%. This has a major impact on service continuity and stability and also hinders the improvement of service quality.

3.3 Imperfect Funding Input Mechanism and Insufficient Capacity for Sustainable Development

Insufficient funding input is one of the main factors restricting the construction of the community-based elderly

care service system. Although governments at all levels have increased fiscal investment in elderly care services year by year in recent years, the overall investment level remains relatively low. In 2023, national fiscal expenditure on elderly care services accounted for 0.8% of GDP, far below the 2%–3% level in developed countries. The investment structure is also unreasonable. Government investment is mainly concentrated on infrastructure construction, while relatively little is allocated to soft inputs such as operational subsidies, personnel training, and service procurement. The enthusiasm of social capital participation is not high, mainly because community-based elderly care services have a long investment return cycle, unclear profit models, and insufficient policy support, resulting in a strong wait-and-see attitude among social capital. Diversified financing channels have not yet been formed, and the responsibilities of the government, market, society, families, and other parties remain unclear, which is not conducive to sustained funding input.

3.4 Incomplete Policy and Regulatory System and Lack of Regulatory Mechanisms

The development of community-based elderly care services depends on sound laws and regulations, but current work in this regard remains far from sufficient. Although the state has issued many relevant policies, most of these policies are administrative regulations or departmental rules, and there is no special law specifically targeting community-based elderly care services. Implementation also varies greatly across regions, greatly weakening the authority and enforceability of policies. Communication among departments is insufficient. Departments such as civil affairs, health, human resources and social security, and housing and urban-rural development are all involved in community-based elderly care services, but an effective communication and coordination mechanism is lacking, which can easily lead to policy overlap, omissions, or contradictions. Inadequate regulation is also a problem. There is a lack of unified service standards and service quality evaluation standards, and service institutions and staff members lack necessary supervision, making service quality difficult to guarantee. Entry thresholds are low, exit mechanisms are absent, and phenomena such as chaotic management and poor service attitudes in some service institutions are common, affecting the image of the industry and the interests of older adults.

4. Improvement Measures for the Construction of the Community-Based Elderly Care Service System

4.1 Optimizing the Service Supply System and Improving the Resource Allocation Mechanism

In response to the current contradiction between

supply and demand in community-based elderly care, optimizing service supply is one of the important means of solving this problem^[2]. The establishment of a multi-level and differentiated service supply system, together with a service model based on families, supported by communities, and supplemented by institutions, can effectively address insufficient service supply. From the perspective of resource allocation, reasonable resource allocation standards should be formulated. The number and service scope of various elderly care service facilities should be reasonably arranged according to factors such as the number of older adults in the community, their age, health status, and economic conditions. In addition, various resources inside and outside the community, such as medical resources, educational resources, and commercial resources, can be fully utilized to realize resource sharing, complementary advantages, and improved resource utilization efficiency.

The key to improving the resource allocation mechanism is to establish a mechanism that can adjust continuously according to actual conditions and achieve precise matching. Big data technology can be used to track the service needs of older adults in communities in a timely manner, and the proportion between service supply and service resources can be adjusted according to changes in service demand, so that service supply can better match service demand. A cross-regional resource allocation mechanism should be established to realize resource sharing and coordinated allocation among different regions, thereby solving the problem of insufficient resources in some areas. Public-private partnership models should be developed to encourage social capital to participate in the construction and operation of community-based elderly care service facilities, forming a service supply model featuring government leadership, market operation, and broad participation by social forces, and improving the sustainability and professionalism of service supply.

4.2 Strengthening Professional Personnel Training and Improving Service Quality

The shortage of professional personnel is a major problem affecting the improvement of community-based elderly care service quality, so attention should be paid to workforce development. Universities, vocational schools, and other institutions can be jointly involved in establishing training bases for community-based elderly care service personnel. Courses related to elderly care service and management, rehabilitation nursing, psychological counseling, and other fields can be offered on campus to cultivate a group of elderly care service personnel with professional knowledge and service awareness. In addition, an in-service training

mechanism should be established so that staff members can regularly receive training and learning opportunities, thereby improving their professional competence and service level. A vocational qualification certification system should be implemented, and unified occupational skill standards should be used to evaluate the professional qualifications and service quality of practitioners.

Improving service quality requires a complete service quality management system. Unified service standards and service processes should be established, and the requirements and operating methods for various service items should be specified, so that services become more standardized and institutionalized. A service quality evaluation system should be established, and the service quality of service personnel should be regularly inspected and assessed so that problems can be identified and solved in a timely manner. Service informatization should be promoted, and intelligent service systems should be used to record and monitor the entire service process, thereby improving service efficiency and transparency. A service feedback mechanism should also be established to extensively solicit opinions and suggestions from older adults and their families on service quality, so as to continuously improve and optimize service content.

4.3 Establishing a Diversified Funding Guarantee Mechanism and Innovating Investment and Financing Models

Funding shortages are an important factor affecting the construction of the community-based elderly care service system. Establishing a sound funding guarantee system is a prerequisite for ensuring the normal operation of the service system. Government investment should be increased, and a fiscal guarantee system with annual growth should be established to meet the funding needs of basic elderly care services. At the same time, diversified fundraising methods, such as government procurement of services, social donations, and corporate sponsorship, should be established to expand funding sources^[3]. A long-term care insurance system should be established to share elderly care costs through insurance mechanisms, reduce the burden on individuals and families, and enable more people to access elderly care services.

Innovating investment and financing methods is an effective means of meeting funding needs, and the decisive role of the market in resource allocation should be fully utilized. Public-private partnership models should be actively promoted to guide social capital into the construction and operation of community-based elderly care facilities, thereby diversifying investment entities. Investment funds for the elderly care service industry should

be established to improve fund utilization efficiency and returns through professional operation. Financial institutions should be encouraged to innovate products and design financial products and services that meet the needs of the elderly care service industry, thereby facilitating financing for elderly care service enterprises. At the same time, a sound risk-sharing mechanism should be established. Government guarantees, insurance protection, and other means can be used to reduce the investment risks of social capital and stimulate its enthusiasm for investment.

4.4 Improving the Policy and Regulatory System and Strengthening the Supervision and Evaluation Mechanism

At present, the degree of improvement of the policy and regulatory system plays a decisive role in the service quality and development level of China's community-based elderly care service system. According to data released by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, by the end of 2023, there were 329,000 community-based elderly care service institutions and facilities nationwide. However, from the perspective of policies and regulations, problems such as inconsistent standards and inadequate supervision still exist. Improving the policy and regulatory system requires the introduction of unified national standards and norms for community-based elderly care services, specifying service items, service standards, staffing, facilities and equipment, and other specific contents, and establishing policies and regulations covering the entire process of access, operation, and exit. At the same time, local governments should also issue corresponding implementation measures according to local conditions, so that policies are feasible and targeted, forming a policy and regulatory system that is vertically connected and horizontally coordinated.

Strengthening supervision and evaluation is an important measure for ensuring the quality of community-based elderly care services. The supervision system should form a three-in-one regulatory pattern consisting of government supervision, industry self-discipline, and social supervision. A normalized service quality evaluation system should be established, and regular evaluations of service institutions and satisfaction surveys among older adults should be conducted. Evaluation should focus on service quality, safety management, personnel qualifications, financial status, and other aspects. Dynamic regulatory files and a credit evaluation system should be established. Service institutions with problems should be treated by category and subjected to corresponding penalties. Third-party evaluation institutions should be established, professional evaluators should be employed, and big data and other technical means should be used to make supervision and

evaluation more scientific and reasonable. In this way, “prior approval, in-process supervision, and post-event evaluation” can be achieved, thereby promoting the construction of the community-based elderly care service system.

5. Conclusion

Looking ahead, against the background of intensifying population aging and the growing diversified needs of older adults, the construction of the community-based elderly care service system must take innovation as its driving force, use institutional innovation to solve development problems, use technological innovation to improve service quality, and use model innovation to meet personalized needs. In particular, the role of digital technologies should be fully leveraged to build a smart elderly care service ecosystem, achieving precise demand matching and reasonable resource allocation^[4]. At the same time, attention should be paid to the integrity and forward-looking nature of top-level design. Effective cross-departmental cooperation mechanisms and diversified funding support mechanisms should be established to steadily promote the construction of the community-based elderly care service system. Only through continuous reform, exploration, and institutional improvement can

a community-based elderly care service system with comprehensive coverage, complete functions, and high quality truly be built, thereby effectively responding to the challenges brought by population aging and realizing the goal of ensuring care for older adults.

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