

How can the Elderly Association better participate in rural mutual aid elderly care

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Abstract: According to relevant statistics, as of the end of 2022, the number of elderly people aged 60 and above in China has reached 280 million, and the total number of people aged 60 to 69 with mild aging has exceeded 147 million. It is expected that by 2030, the proportion of the population aged 60 and above in China will reach 36.6%. From this, it can be seen that the focus of China's aging population is still on rural areas, and "rural elderly care" has become a topic of constant concern in China's academic community. Among many elderly care models, the "low-cost" mutual assistance and cooperation elderly care model can be seen as a feasible path to solve rural elderly care problems in China. This article aims to explore the role and future development direction of welfare oriented elderly associations in rural mutual aid elderly care. Through a review of relevant literature, this article finds that the elderly association plays a role in providing services, promoting social interaction, and reducing family burden in rural mutual aid elderly care. However, there are also problems such as funding shortage and talent shortage. In the future, through the role of the Elderly Association in mutual elderly care, specific suggestions and measures will be proposed to further promote the well-being and development of the elderly.

Keywords: Elderly Association; Mutual assistance for elderly care; Elderly people.

1. Introduction

In the 1980s, due to practical needs, China implemented the one-child policy, and the family structure gradually presented a "four two one" model of "four elderly people, one spouse, and one child.". In this mode, children bear significant parenting pressure. Due to the limitations of their own careers, the family based elderly care model will be difficult to sustain. At this time, the elderly association, as a grassroots elderly mass organization, plays an important role in self-management, education, service, and supervision of rural elderly people in China, and plays an important role in rural mutual assistance and elderly care. Through the study of relevant literature, this article finds that the elderly association, which relies on the elderly themselves, has quickly gained repeated practice in various regions and summarized certain successful experiences in participating in mutual aid elderly care. The results show that the elderly association plays an indelible role in participating in rural mutual aid elderly care. However, there are still some problems and challenges for the participation of elderly associations in mutual aid elderly care, and further exploration and improvement are needed to better enable elderly associations to participate in rural mutual aid elderly care.

2. Literature References

2.1. Research on Mutual Aid Elderly Care

2.1.1. Research mutual aid elderly care from a feasibility perspective

The social development prospects of the mutual aid elderly care model have been elucidated, and the subjective and objective conditions for piloting and promoting this model have been elucidated. Many scholars at home and abroad have continuously studied the practicality of rural mutual aid elderly care development from the perspectives of cost

advantages, cultural traditions, policy support, and practice. Wu Xiangxue (2016) [1], Yang Jinghui (2017) [2], Liu Nina (2019) [3], and Waialice (2011) [4] believe that mutual aid elderly care can effectively reduce the burden on the government and society, and has certain operability in practice. In terms of cultural traditions, Li Qiao (2021) [5] believes that there is a widespread "social shadow of acquaintances" in rural areas of China, which has laid a solid emotional foundation for implementing mutual aid elderly care in rural areas and provided many conveniences for carrying out mutual aid elderly care. In terms of policy support, Wu Xiangxue (2016) believes that policy support introduced at the national level can provide a political and economic institutional foundation for rural mutual aid elderly care. In terms of social practice, Wu Xiangxue (2016) [1] and Liu Nina (2017) [6] believe that the emergence of Yizhuang in ancient China can be seen as the predecessor of today's mutual aid elderly care, and the accumulated experience provides factual basis for the practicality of the rural mutual aid elderly care model.

2.1.2. Research mutual aid elderly care from a strategic perspective

The problems in the operation of the community mutual aid elderly care model are the direction and reference for the future development of the community mutual aid elderly care model, and home-based elderly care is an important way of elderly care. A survey by Gammonley (2019) [7] showed that older adults with healthy care habits and good neighborhood relationships have a higher willingness to participate in mutual care. Zhao Zhiqiang (2012) [8] used Hebei Province as the sample, Xu Jiaming (2015) [9] used Huai'an and He Zhaiping (2017) [10] in Jiangsu Province to study the operational effectiveness of X and D villages in Datong City. Qian Suwei (2021) [11] pointed out that "time banking" is a mutual aid elderly care model that is worth learning from and drawing on in the long term. Yu Changyong (2019) [12] stated that market mechanisms should be introduced for rural mutual

aid elderly care in China, which is consistent with the concept of diversified social welfare and can help solve the problem of rural elderly care. Liu Zhimin and Zhang Yansong (2020) pointed out that with strong government support, various regions across the country are actively exploring effective mutual aid elderly care methods, and different attempts should be made according to local special needs. He Xuefeng (2020) [14] believes that fully mobilizing the elderly care services provided by young people to elderly people can enable them to receive respect and economic returns in their services, which is worth learning from. Liao Huan (2021) [15] pointed out that many provinces, cities, and counties in China are currently exploring and practicing mutual aid elderly care models, including the "neighborhood mutual aid" model in Shaanxi Mizhi, the "elderly association" model in Enshi, Hubei, the "happiness home" model in Feixiang, Hebei, and the "time bank" model widely piloted throughout the country.

2.1.3. Research on factors affecting willingness to participate in mutual aid elderly care

Xu Jiaming's (2015) study [16] shows that 60.1% of empty nest elderly are very or more willing to achieve retirement through mutual assistance. The survey results of Cao Meijuan (2018) [17] show that compared with older adults, younger adults have a higher desire to participate in mutual aid elderly care. Among them, older adults with firm religious beliefs, good physical and mental health, and no major diseases have a higher intention of mutual aid elderly care. However, the study by Yu Changyong (2019) [12] suggests that the willingness of elderly people in rural areas to provide mutual assistance for elderly care is generally not high. The main reasons for this situation include the level of economic development, personal savings, and physical health. Yang Jinghui (2020) [18] conducted a study on 637 elderly people in Jiangsu Province, and the results showed that there was varying degrees of resistance to mutual aid elderly care due to factors such as age, health status, marital status, economic income, intergenerational relationships, neighborhood relationships, and geography among the elderly. According to a survey conducted by Tao Weiwei (2020) [19], 60.2% of the elderly have a high willingness to adopt mutual aid elderly care. Regression analysis shows that the age, education level, loneliness score, and social participation level of the elderly have independent effects on them. Xin Baoying and Yang Zhen (2021) conducted field research on some rural areas in Shandong Province and used the logit model to empirically study the willingness of elderly people to participate in mutual aid elderly care. The results showed that besides individual factors, participation willingness is also influenced by various factors such as family.

2.1.4. Research on the Development Dilemma of Mutual Aid Elderly Care

Li Qiao (2018) [21], Qu Shaoxu (2020) [22], and Liu Chunchun (2021) [23] believe that there is currently a problem of single service types in the mutual aid elderly care carried out in rural areas of China. At the same time, there is an imbalance in service supply and demand, and a low level of specialization. It is necessary to continuously enrich the service content of mutual aid elderly care, cultivate a group of professional mutual aid teams, and improve the practical skills of mutual aid elderly care service providers to gradually improve the quality of rural mutual aid elderly care services. Wang Weijin (2015) [24] pointed out that there are problems with rural mutual aid elderly care, such as a "face view", unclear government roles, and unstable funds. It is suggested

to strengthen the guidance of mutual aid concepts, clarify the positioning of government roles, and encourage diversified capital to "open up resources and reduce costs". He Zhaiping (2017) believes that there are problems with insufficient support funds, insufficient participation of social forces, and low management and service levels in rural mutual aid elderly care. Strengthen investment in social forces, especially highlighting the social service role of non-profit organizations, and build an external communication channel that can enhance mutual assistance capabilities. He Qian (2018) [25] believes that the unclear definition of the status and role of rural mutual aid elderly care for oneself, insufficient financial support for mutual aid elderly care, inadequate supporting facilities for elderly care services, and lack of professional elderly care institutions are the key to the long-term existence of mutual aid elderly care. In the future, relevant policies and regulations will be introduced and gradually improved, a comprehensive and sustainable mutual aid elderly care service system will be established, and professional talents will be cultivated.

2.2. Research on Rural Elderly Association

2.2.1. Development of Rural Elderly Association

Deng Yanhua and Ruan Hengfu (2008) pointed out that due to performance evaluation and economic benefits, grassroots governments have adopted a "laissez faire" and "selective" governance approach towards non-governmental organizations, creating space for autonomy for elderly associations. The elderly association itself can absorb ordinary villagers from the elderly population, thereby enhancing the authority and cohesion of the elderly association in rural areas. Li Zhongzhao (2010) [27] proposed that "rural areas are deeply influenced by traditional culture" and the utilization of social capital through the "kinship" model is the cultural foundation for their development in the context of global community transformation; The elite class can mobilize more social resources and achieve more authoritative value distribution. Chen Ding (2010) [28] proposed from the perspective of "social capital helps to improve group behavior levels" and "internal and external interaction within organizations" that "elderly associations" have favorable conditions for "intermediate elites to gather more social capital"

2.2.2. Capacity building of rural elderly associations

In terms of internal construction of the elderly association, Lu Kerong and Lou Haibo (2008) [29] took the rural elderly association in Zhejiang Province as an example and proposed to gradually strengthen the construction of the elderly association's own capabilities, while also emphasizing the importance of self-management within the elderly association. Ciqin Ying (2016) [30] and others studied some rural elderly associations in eastern Zhejiang from the perspective of obtaining various elderly care resources. They generally agree that most elderly associations in the region rely on the social interaction of the "elite group" to effectively integrate various elderly care resources. At the level of external resources to assist elderly associations, Qiu Li (2018) [31] conducted a study on some rural elderly associations in eastern Jiangsu and central Zhejiang, and found that government departments play an indispensable role in the sustainable development of mutual aid and elderly care in rural social organizations. Meng Ningning (2016) [32] took the elderly association in a certain street of Beijing as the research object and believed that in order to better promote the development of the elderly

care industry of the association, there needs to be a certain degree of communication and cooperation between the government and the association. Zhan Jingpeng (2017) [33] conducted a study on the case of the Elderly Association in Yi'an District, Tongling City, Anhui Province. He pointed out that increasing government financial investment and effectively promoting the implementation of welfare policies are two major driving forces for strengthening the construction of grassroots elderly associations in urban and rural areas. Li Xinyuan and Liu Lin (2014) [34] took the Shaanxi International Elderly Assistance Program as an example and pointed out that the government plays a certain guiding and promoting role in the development of the elderly association. On this basis, more social resources can be driven to flow into the elderly association, providing comprehensive support for the development of the elderly association in all aspects. At the same time, it is necessary to continuously improve the mutual aid elderly care training of the elderly association. Deng Xueyi (2012) [35] explored how to enhance the operational and service capabilities of rural elderly associations by strengthening mutual aid elderly care training through participating in mutual aid elderly care projects for some rural elderly people.

2.2.3. The elderly care function of rural elderly associations

Most scholars believe that social organizations, especially rural elderly associations, provide many conveniences for mutual assistance and elderly care in rural areas, including material life, emotional life, political rights, cultural entertainment, social status, and so on. For example, Gan Mantang (2018) [36] took Jinshan Village, Nan'an City, Fujian Province as the research object and pointed out that the rural elderly association used existing resources in the village to establish elderly canteens, providing simple catering services for the elderly in the village, which is a way to practice mutual assistance and elderly care. Han Lu (2011) [37] pointed out that rural elderly associations are always guided by the actual needs of the elderly in daily life, providing daily necessities for local elderly people to meet their normal lives. In this regard, it has been found that this method is more effective than distributing cash and is worth learning from. Wang Yongdao (2010) [38] took the example of the Rural Elderly Association in Leqing City, Zhejiang Province, and pointed out that the Rural Elderly Association regularly carries out activities such as chatting with left behind elderly people and listening to their stories, which can to some extent make up for the lack of spiritual elderly care for the elderly. Ye Xiaoni (2011) [39] believes that encouraging elderly people to join rural elderly associations can open up a convenient channel for them to obtain external information, make them more aware of their own elderly care rights, and become a regulator for safeguarding the rights of rural elderly people. Ye Yunqing (2016) [40] and Tian Xianrui (2012) [41] believe that elderly organizations in various regions can organize activities tailored to local conditions to enrich the leisure time of the elderly and add color to their lives.

2.3. Mutual Aid Elderly Care with the Participation of the Elderly Association

Chen Huiyun (2018) [42] believes that the Elderly Association can effectively convey and implement the latest policy guidelines highly related to the rights and interests of the elderly, provide basic services for the daily life of the

elderly, and promote the development of the elderly security industry by participating in social governance and mutual assistance elderly care. Lu Weifeng (2017) [43] believes that the Elderly Association can provide thoughtful services such as spiritual companionship to elderly people who stay at home due to their children's migrant work, in addition to basic daily care. Zhang Qiang (2018) [44] said that the Elderly Association is a "walkie talkie" that connects the elderly and the outside world, and has a positive and dynamic role that cannot be underestimated in the rural elderly care industry. Li Jing (2019) [45] explained from the perspective of resource allocation that the Elderly Association mobilizes idle rural human resources, such as young healthy elderly and left behind women, to form a tested volunteer team to meet the different elderly care needs. Zhou Shujuan (2019) [46] pointed out that the Elderly Association can contribute to the local elderly industry by carrying out volunteer services, which to some extent improves the quality of elderly care services for the elderly. Gan Mantang and Wang Yao (2019) [47] believe that in China, both urban and rural elderly associations have received more or less recognition and support from the government, providing a lot of convenience for the elderly care industry. After conducting a survey on an elderly association in Zhejiang Province, Ye Yunqing (2016) [48] believes that its independence is greatly limited due to the lack of corresponding laws and regulations as a solid institutional guarantee, as well as the lack of sufficient funds to ensure its independent development, which hinders the sustainable development of mutual aid elderly care. According to a survey conducted by an elderly association in Wuhan, Zhang Qiang (2018) believes that there is a risk of social stratification due to class differentiation within the association, which needs to be given sufficient attention. Li Jing (2019) [45] analyzed the capacity building of the D Village Elderly Association and pointed out that the association faces serious problems in resource acquisition, which need to be further addressed by all parties.

According to the sorting and summarization of domestic and foreign literature, foreign countries have taken the lead in researching elderly associations and mutual aid elderly care, which provides some reference significance for the relevant research on the participation of elderly associations in mutual aid elderly care in China.

For a period of time, China has explored mutual aid elderly care from various perspectives, such as analyzing the factors that affect the willingness of elderly people to participate in mutual aid elderly care, the models and operating mechanisms of mutual aid elderly care, and the problems and countermeasures that arise in the development process of mutual aid elderly care. Continuously enriching the theoretical system of mutual aid elderly care in China, helping to solve the difficulties of mutual aid elderly care in our country. In this process, there are also research results indicating that the elderly association also plays an indispensable role, and the participation of the elderly association in mutual aid elderly care plays an indispensable role in alleviating the severe elderly care pressure in China.

The current challenges for the participation of elderly associations: Although there is much potential for elderly associations to participate in mutual aid elderly care, they also face some challenges. Research has pointed out that as a non-governmental organization rooted at the grassroots level, the Elderly Association plays a role of communication and bridge. However, in the process of participating in mutual aid elderly

care, it still faces problems such as insufficient resources, limited organizational capacity, single service content, and unclear identity positioning.

3. The role of the Elderly Association in rural mutual aid and elderly care

The Elderly Association is a non-profit social organization supported by the state and organized by the elderly themselves for the purpose of not making a profit. It is the "spokesperson" of the elderly population and the "link" between the elderly and various social forces. It plays a role in information transmission and communication, providing feedback on the real needs of the elderly to relevant forces. Its purpose is to gather elderly care, cultural and entertainment, health lectures, psychological counseling, and daily life care. Spiritual comfort, medical care, and legal aid for the elderly help improve the elderly's retirement life, enabling them to be happier and more dignified in their later years.

3.1. Provide convenient elderly care services

The rural mutual aid elderly care with the participation of the Elderly Association is a new type of elderly care model in China. It is different from both family elderly care and institutional elderly care. It is organized and led by the government or other non-profit organizations, not for profit, fully utilizing favorable resources, and providing various life care, medical care, cultural and entertainment services for the elderly in rural areas, meeting the diverse elderly care needs.

3.2. Promote social interaction among the elderly population

The Elderly Association organizes various activities, such as dancing, singing, playing chess, playing cards, etc., and organizes volunteer service activities to encourage young people to participate in rural mutual aid elderly care, helping the elderly clean up, shop, take care of their lives, etc., so that the elderly can feel the care and support of society. Providing a platform for communication and interaction for the elderly, giving them the opportunity to meet new friends, share life experiences and happiness. Enable elderly people to continuously improve their physical fitness, enrich their spiritual life, and reduce the risk of autism through participation and interaction.

3.3. Reduce the burden of family elderly care

The services provided by the Elderly Association have reduced the burden on families in caring for the elderly, enabling family members to better engage in work and life. The Elderly Association provides elderly people with services such as taking care of their daily lives, providing medical care, organizing entertainment activities, providing psychological support and counseling services, training and education services for family members. These services not only meet the basic needs of the elderly, but also help family members alleviate their anxiety and helplessness when their physical and mental states are unstable, helping them better cope with the care issues of the elderly, thereby reducing the burden on families in caring for the elderly.

4. The problems existing in the elderly association's mutual assistance and elderly care in rural areas

4.1. Shortage of pension funds

The activities organized and carried out by the Elderly Association, such as dance, music, handicrafts, and social gatherings, require certain funds as material support. Currently, the funding sources of China's Elderly Association mainly rely on membership fees and government subsidies, and the shortage of funds restricts its service development. On the one hand, the income from membership fees is often limited, making it difficult to meet the growing service needs of elderly associations. On the other hand, the amount of government subsidies is also limited, and the application process is cumbersome and often cannot be timely implemented. These factors have led to a shortage of funds for the elderly association, making it difficult to carry out more service projects and activities.

4.2. Insufficient service talents

The volunteers and staff of the elderly association generally lack professional knowledge and skills, which affects the quality of service. Firstly, most of the volunteers of the Elderly Association are community residents who voluntarily participate. Although they are enthusiastic about public welfare, they face shortcomings in their professional knowledge and service skills in elderly care. Secondly, the staff of the elderly association are mostly non professionals, who may encounter various problems during the service process and cannot solve them in a timely and effective manner. Not only does it affect the service quality of the elderly association, but it also limits its development and growth.

4.3. Limited service scope

The services of the Elderly Association mainly focus on daily care and cultural entertainment, with limited ability to provide professional services such as medical care. Although they are committed to providing various support and care for the elderly, due to the need for professional knowledge and skills in medical care, elderly associations may only be able to provide basic health consultations and guidance, or assist elderly people in arranging medical appointments and treatment, and cannot provide comprehensive medical services such as disease diagnosis, drug treatment, and rehabilitation care.

5. Policy recommendations

5.1. Enhance awareness of mutual aid and elderly care

In order to better participate in mutual aid elderly care, the elderly association needs to raise its own awareness. Firstly, the elderly association should increase the awareness of residents and actively seek more powerful resources and support. At the same time, the elderly association should encourage and guide the elderly to cultivate a sense of belonging and responsibility. Positive elderly care information can be conveyed to the elderly through media, brochures, lectures, and other forms, encouraging them to actively participate in elderly care activities. The elderly association should pay attention to publicity and promotion,

enhance the awareness and willingness of the elderly to participate in mutual aid elderly care, and stimulate their interest and enthusiasm in participating in mutual aid elderly care.

5.2. Provide diversified elderly care services

The elderly association can explore different elderly care models based on the differentiated attitudes and needs of the elderly towards the association, such as providing convenient home care, door-to-door care, elderly cafeterias, cultural and entertainment services, and providing comprehensive elderly care services and care; Carry out a series of mutual aid elderly care training activities, such as regular health lectures, psychological counseling, etc., to meet the physical and mental health needs of the elderly; Carry out "one-on-one" assistance teams to enhance the confidence of the elderly in being needed; Set up skill training courses to enhance the life skills of the elderly and provide diversified elderly care services.

5.3. Establish and strengthen cooperative relationships

The elderly association needs to establish partnerships with other organizations to jointly promote the development of mutual aid elderly care. For example, collaborating with hospitals to provide health check ups and rehabilitation services for the elderly; Collaborate with educational institutions to carry out skills training for the elderly; Collaborate with businesses to provide elderly people with discounted shopping and other benefits. In addition, the elderly association also needs to establish a sound volunteer team, actively introduce professional talents, enrich the talent team of the elderly association, strengthen training and management of the talent team, and improve their professional literacy and service level.

5.4. Strengthen investment in mutual aid pension funds

As an exploratory and innovative elderly care model, the establishment of the elderly association requires a certain amount of capital to be invested in registration. Without registration, it is impossible to accept public donations from all sectors of society. In order to solve the problem of funding shortage, the elderly association needs to actively explore diversified funding sources. For example, revenue can be increased through fundraising activities, seeking corporate sponsorship, and applying for funding from foundations. At the same time, the elderly association also needs to strengthen its financial management and play the valuable role of every penny.

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