

# An Exploration of Rural Elderly Care Models under the Rural Revitalization Strategy: A Case Study of Ningxia

Yalin Li

Anhui University of Finance and Economics, Bengbu, Anhui, 233030, China

---

**Abstract:** With the deepening of aging, elderly care has become a focus of attention in various countries. China is also facing a serious aging issue, and how to reasonably solve the elderly care problems has become one of the key research topics for Chinese experts and scholars. China has vast territory with significant regional disparities between the east and west, leading to unbalanced urban and rural development. The aging issue in western rural areas is more severe, yet their development is relatively lagging behind, with serious population loss challenging traditional family care models. Addressing the elderly care problem requires targeted measures based on practical considerations. Taking Ningxia as a case study, this paper finds that the material living standards of elderly rural residents in Ningxia are low, and their spiritual life is relatively lacking. By analyzing the deficiencies in rural elderly care in Ningxia from the perspectives of family care and institutional care, corresponding solutions are proposed. Currently, rural family care in Ningxia faces difficulties, institutional care development is immature, and public acceptance is low. Therefore, suggestions are made to improve rural infrastructure to retain labor, enhance the operation and internal environment of care institutions, and increase public acceptance, aiming to improve the living conditions of elderly rural residents in Ningxia and meet their care needs.

**Keywords:** Aging; Rural Areas; Pension Model.

---

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Literature Review

In the 21st century, various factors have exacerbated the aging process in China, highlighting the disparities between urban and rural areas. Consequently, the issue of elderly care in rural areas has come into the research focus of experts and scholars. Many experts and scholars have begun to observe the current situation of elderly care in rural areas of China, analyzing the problems and deficiencies faced in rural elderly care, and proposing their own improvement and solution measures. This study focuses on the elderly care model in rural areas of Ningxia, drawing on the experiences of similar regions and primarily reviewing domestic research due to the majority of foreign studies being conducted at a macro level.

Jing Lixia (2021) conducted a study on the current status of elderly care in the southern mountainous regions of Ningxia, using survey questionnaires to interact with elderly groups and township officials. She analyzed the supply-demand contradictions in elderly care services in Ningxia, emphasizing the conflicts between the diversified elderly care needs of the elderly population and the uniform supply of care services, as well as the scarcity of professional personnel supply. She also addressed the increasing demand for elderly care services among the elderly population and the limited natural and human resources in the Ningxia region, proposing improvement methods at the government, family, social, and individual levels based on the analysis of the causes of these contradictions.

Qi Ling and Zhang Jirong (2019) surveyed the elderly people's willingness and physical conditions for elderly care in the southern region of Ningxia, revealing a prevalent occurrence of diseases among the elderly in the area, with a majority preferring family care. Xin Xiujuan and Si Hanwu (2016) conducted a study in L City in the southern mountainous region of Ningxia, investigating the willingness

of middle-aged groups and their children to participate in insurance as they enter old age. They found that factors such as family structure, payment amounts, and children's occupations influence the elderly population's willingness to participate in insurance. They suggested increasing the promotion of elderly insurance in the region and raising pension amounts to encourage more elderly individuals to objectively consider and voluntarily participate in insurance.

In summary, domestic research on rural elderly care models has yielded rich results, with many scholars conducting holistic studies on elderly care models in rural areas. Given that Ningxia is located in the northwest inland region with a weak economic foundation and relatively underdeveloped economy, coupled with its status as a settlement for ethnic minorities with unique cultural and historical backgrounds, the applicability of macro-level studies to Ningxia is limited. This paper uses Ningxia as a case study to provide a specific analysis of the aging situation in rural Ningxia and offer corresponding measures and recommendations, aiming to provide valuable insights for rural elderly care in Ningxia.

### 1.2. Theoretical basis

The Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, proposed by the renowned American psychologist Abraham Maslow, is a motivational theory that categorizes human needs into different levels. Each level of need occupies a different position, and individuals' primary needs vary at different stages. Maslow categorizes needs into five levels: physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. Generally, individuals pursue higher-level needs only after fulfilling lower-level needs. However, these five levels are not isolated; they simply emphasize different needs at different stages of development. These needs are not mutually exclusive; they can collectively constitute an individual's needs, with greater capabilities leading to higher desired needs.

For elderly individuals living in rural areas, their most

pressing concerns are clothing, shelter, and food, which constitute their most basic needs and the primary focus of their pursuits. Basic medical care and a safe living environment represent their safety needs, which are relatively lower-level needs. Respect and self-actualization refer to the need for elderly rural individuals to receive equal respect and attention, to not become burdens on others, to have their own value, and to find spiritual fulfillment. These needs are considered higher-level needs.

By applying this theory to analyze elderly care in rural areas of Ningxia, it becomes clear what the current focus should be on in Ningxia and how resources should be allocated in the future development process to provide more reasonable support for the elderly population in rural areas.

## 2. Ningxia Pension Model

According to the living place of the elderly, the main modes of providing for the elderly in rural areas are divided into family self-supporting mode and institutional supporting mode.

### 2.1. Family Self-supporting Model

Currently, in rural Ningxia, the elderly care for senior citizens is primarily provided through families. This form of elderly care involves addressing the needs of elderly individuals within the family unit, with other family members ensuring their well-being through various means. Elderly individuals who are still capable of working can rely on their land for self-care. On one hand, family members are responsible for the elderly's livelihood, including their financial and emotional well-being. Whether the elderly live alone and receive financial support from their children or rotate between living with their children, both approaches are rooted in China's longstanding culture of filial piety, where children have a duty to care for their parents. The concept of parents raising children when young and children supporting parents in old age has been a trusted belief in China throughout history. This caregiving approach can become the mainstream model for rural elderly care, partly because children only need to ensure their parents' well-being, allowing them to reside in their original homes or with their children without the need for other care facilities.

Ningxia, as an autonomous region with a significant population of ethnic minorities, has around 2.59 million minority individuals, accounting for 36% of the total population, according to the 2020 census data. Due to factors such as dietary habits, many ethnic minorities choose to return to their hometowns or nearby cities for development, providing strong support for parental care by children. Additionally, in rural areas, income primarily comes from land cultivation. For elderly individuals in rural areas, land holds significant emotional value as their ancestors have relied on this land for generations. Therefore, elderly individuals with some physical capabilities choose to continue working on the land until they are no longer able to do so. According to the 2020 National Economic and Social Development Statistics Bulletin of the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Ningxia had a total grain planting area of 10.1875 million mu in 2020, indicating that land provides a substantial economic foundation for rural elderly individuals in Ningxia.

### 2.2. Institutional Pension Model

Institutional elderly care primarily relies on societal efforts,

utilizing various types of institutions as platforms to provide elderly care services. These institutions are mainly constructed by the government, organizations, or individuals to offer a range of services for the elderly. Children can, based on mutual agreement and voluntary principles following thorough communication with their parents, choose to send their elderly relatives to these care facilities. While institutional elderly care offers numerous advantages, it also presents certain challenges. On one hand, the limited number of government-run care facilities cannot accommodate all elderly individuals, and the high costs associated with private care institutions are often beyond the means of ordinary rural families. On the other hand, given China's historical emphasis on filial piety and the importance placed on familial bonds, coupled with prevailing cultural beliefs, there is a prevalent notion that not caring for elderly parents personally is considered an act of impiety. This perception leads many elderly individuals to harbor reservations towards institutional care.

In March 2022, the Standing Committee of the People's Congress of Ningxia conducted an inspection on the implementation of the "Regulations on the Promotion of Elderly Care Services in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region." During this process, it was found that by 2021, Ningxia had established 13 various types of elderly care institutions. However, the occupancy rates of these institutions were generally low, with only around 7,000 out of the available 25,000 beds being utilized, resulting in an occupancy rate of less than 30%. Furthermore, Ningxia currently lacks a unified method and standard for assessing the disability levels of the elderly, and some care facilities suffer from insufficient medical and nursing capabilities. Located in the inland region of northwest China, Ningxia's public mindset is relatively conservative, leading to a low level of acceptance and approval of elderly care institutions. The shift in attitudes will require time, indicating that the widespread development of institutional elderly care in Ningxia will necessitate a significant period for full acceptance and integration.

## 3. The Problems of Rural Elderly Care

### 3.1. Challenges in Family Elderly Care

For rural elderly individuals, many prefer the option of family elderly care, considering it the most ideal choice. Rooted in ancient Chinese Confucian philosophy, family elderly care emphasizes filial piety as a top virtue. Elderly individuals often hold the belief in raising children to ensure care in old age, leading them to place high expectations and trust in their offspring for elderly care, rather than external institutions. However, this care model is founded on moral obligations. Although laws mandate children to financially support their parents, enforcement is closely tied to moral principles, rendering this care approach unstable and susceptible to failure due to external factors.

According to the "2020 National Economic and Social Development Statistics Bulletin of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region," Ningxia had a total of 981,000 rural migrant workers, with 769,000 working outside the region, challenging the traditional family elderly care model in rural areas. Migrant workers are exposed to diverse ideologies and materialism, potentially prioritizing personal pleasure over traditional values, including filial piety. The fading emphasis on respecting and caring for elders contributes to the

predicament faced by family elderly care.

Influenced by the concept of raising children for future care and societal norms, many households have both elderly parents and young children, burdening adults with the responsibility of supporting multiple generations. The pressure of providing for and nurturing both elders and children is substantial. Due to societal expectations, many elderly individuals sacrifice their own quality of life to ensure the well-being of their descendants. In modern society, the rising demands for children to acquire diverse skills and access quality education incur significant costs, impacting the livelihoods of elderly individuals.

### **3.2. Underdeveloped Institutional Elderly Care**

In the current stage of social development, elderly care is a focal point of national attention, with institutional elderly care emerging as a prevailing trend. Undeniably, institutional elderly care plays a pivotal role in addressing elderly care challenges. Establishing nursing homes and senior care facilities can significantly alleviate the burdens of family elderly care and provide more specialized care for the elderly. However, the systematic implementation of institutional elderly care in Ningxia is a gradual process. Many elderly individuals view being placed in care facilities by their children as an act of evading filial duties, reflecting a deep-rooted belief that is hard to change, leading to resistance towards institutional care and a preference for traditional care methods. Moreover, institutional care entails financial costs, and many elderly individuals, raised in times of financial hardship, perceive it as wasteful spending, opting to stay at home alone rather than incur expenses at care facilities.

### **3.3. Challenges in Institutional Elderly Care**

In the current stage of social development, elderly care stands as a critical national concern, with institutional elderly care emerging as the prevailing trend. It is undeniable that institutional elderly care plays a pivotal role in addressing elderly care challenges. The establishment of nursing homes and senior care facilities can significantly alleviate the burden of family elderly care and provide more professional care for the elderly. However, the systematic implementation of institutional elderly care in Ningxia is not an overnight accomplishment. On one hand, for many elderly individuals, being placed in care facilities by their children is seen as evading filial responsibilities, deemed as a lack of filial piety. This deeply ingrained belief is hard to change, leading to resistance towards institutional care and a preference for traditional care methods. Moreover, institutional care entails financial costs, and many elderly individuals, raised in times of financial hardship, perceive it as wasteful spending, preferring to stay at home alone rather than incur expenses at care facilities.

### **3.4. Imbalance in Supply and Demand for Elderly Care Services**

The imbalance between supply and demand for elderly care services in rural Ningxia primarily manifests in the increasing diversity of elderly care needs and the limited resources available. As society progresses and basic survival needs are met without pressure, individuals begin pursuing higher-level needs. However, the existing elderly care resources in rural Ningxia are limited, with some services lacking in specialization. Apart from disbursing pensions and providing financial support to some social care institutions, the

government offers minimal additional services, such as distributing supplies to elderly individuals, periodic visits, and organizing activities for them. Rural infrastructure development is also inadequate, with a lack of recreational facilities like fitness equipment and game rooms for the elderly. Even public squares for elderly activities are scarce, leaving their spiritual well-being unfulfilled. As elderly individuals seek both quantity and quality in care services, some care institutions in remote rural areas of Ningxia struggle to attract and retain professional staff due to harsh living conditions and limited economic development. Consequently, they lack sufficient expertise to provide specialized services for the elderly. In certain regions, sporadic physical examinations are offered to the elderly, but the timings are inconsistent, and the range of tests is limited, failing to meet basic healthcare needs.

## **4. Suggestions for Improving Rural Elderly Care**

### **4.1. Enhancing Rural Family Elderly Care Models**

The weakening of the functionality of family elderly care is inevitable, yet the family elderly care model still holds a significant proportion in rural Ningxia. It is not feasible to completely abandon this model; therefore, improvements must be made on the existing foundation through continuous optimization to maximize its effectiveness. Enhancements to the family elderly care model can be initiated in the following ways. Enhancing Employment Services. A partial cause of the weakening of family elderly care is labor force migration. Addressing this issue at its root requires elevating the level of rural employment services. Increased economic investment and a shift of more employment and entrepreneurship policies towards this aspect are essential. Developing rural economies vigorously, enhancing infrastructure construction, and attracting migrant workers to voluntarily return to their hometowns for employment are crucial. Compared to urban areas, rural regions possess their own advantages. Through relevant knowledge and skill training, individuals can broaden their horizons, discover entrepreneurial opportunities in their hometowns, and capitalize on their professional knowledge to enhance production, cultivation, and sales. Additionally, non-labor-intensive jobs can employ elderly individuals, allowing physically fit seniors to meet their elderly care needs, realize their value, increase their income, and fill the void in their spiritual well-being.

### **4.2. Improving the "Public-Private Partnership" Elderly Care Model**

Many elderly care institutions currently operate in a "public" or "private" capacity, with a separation between government and private entities. Establishing high-quality elderly care institutions demands substantial financial resources that individuals or businesses alone cannot bear. The operational costs post-establishment require significant manpower, a supply the government cannot guarantee. Therefore, a collaborative approach combining the strengths of both government and private entities is proposed to establish and operate elderly care institutions. The government can invest in the initial construction phase and oversee the later operational stages, while private organizations are responsible for the day-to-day operations post-establishment. This innovative approach in the elderly

care institution model is exemplified by the Yuhai Elderly Care Center in Ningxia, funded by the government and operated by private organizations. The center, with its vast scale and comprehensive facilities, caters to the diverse needs of elderly individuals, aiming to provide the most comfortable environment and optimal care. The center also integrates a "medical care combined with elderly care" model by constructing an elderly hospital within the institution, offering comprehensive health checks, monitoring mental and psychological well-being, and providing physical rehabilitation treatments for those in need. Situated in close proximity to the Ningxia Medical University General Hospital, the center can meet more specialized medical needs. This exploration of the "public-private partnership" model in elderly care by Ningxia has yielded positive results and can be replicated in other regions. However, the substantial funding required for such a scale of elderly care institutions necessitates a thorough analysis of local conditions in other cities and counties to construct "public-private partnership" elderly care institutions tailored to the specific circumstances.

### 4.3. Enhancing Collective Mutual Aid Elderly Care Models

In the face of challenges in family elderly care and the insufficient development momentum of institutional elderly care, the government and scholars are seeking a suitable elderly care model that adapts to the aging population of China and is more suitable for widespread promotion. Community elderly care, emerging as a new type of elderly care model, allows elderly individuals to receive professional care while residing at home, providing them with both the warmth of home and societal care. This enables elderly individuals to actively engage and participate. Although community elderly care is still in its exploratory phase and not widely implemented, there are valuable insights to be gleaned. For rural elderly individuals, lacking a community structure makes it challenging to provide services at the community level. However, lessons from community elderly care can be applied by providing services at the village level, where the village collective assumes community functions, organizing professional personnel to provide elderly individuals with daily care, nursing, and emotional support. Given the unique circumstances of rural areas, retaining young professionals requires significant physical and financial resources. Therefore, based on local conditions, organizing elderly individuals in rural areas with surplus energy to care for other elderly individuals who are unable to care for themselves can be a viable solution. These individuals are close in age, share common topics, and do not experience generational gaps. Their services are not measured in monetary terms but rather based on equal exchange. As they age or become unable to care for themselves, they can receive the same level of care. While this approach involves elderly individuals residing at home and receiving elderly care services supported by the village collective, it should also leverage the roles of multiple entities including the government, society, families, and individuals to collectively explore and enhance this form of elderly care.

## Acknowledgments

This work was supported in part by fund project: 2023 Research and Innovation Fund for Graduate Students of Anhui University of Finance and Economics (Project number: ACYC2023037).

## References

- [1] Dai Jing. Research on Rural Elderly Care Models in Underdeveloped Areas in Central China [D]. Shanghai: Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 2019.
- [2] Liu E, Wang Chen, Meng Xiaolu, Yang Zhenyan. Research on Rural Elderly Care Models under the Background of Aging -- Based on the Investigation of Lujun County Green Village. *Agriculture and Technology*, 2020, 40(16).
- [3] Qi Ling, Zhang Jirong. Elderly Care Willingness, Health Status, and Health Service Needs of Rural Elderly People in Southern Ningxia. *Journal of Chinese Gerontology*, 2018, 38(14).
- [4] Xue Ziyang, Yang Linghui, Song Li. Research on the Selection and Subject Responsibility of Rural Elderly Care Models. *Rural. Agriculture. Farmers (B Edition)*, 2021, (05).
- [5] Xu Chuanchuan. Research on the Current Situation of Elderly Care in Empty-nest Families in Yinchuan. *China Management Informatization*, 2015, 18(23).
- [6] Ma Zhonglian. The Dilemma Faced by Rural Elderly Care in Ningxia and the Construction of Elderly Care Models. *Ningxia Party School Journal*, 2014, 16(04).
- [7] Zhang Yuxin, Liu Xuan, Lu Jiehua. Exploration of the Impact of Changes in National Land Transfer Policies on Rural Elderly Care. *Population and Health*, 2021(01).
- [8] Yu Xiaoli. Selection of Rural Elderly Care Models under Filial Piety Culture. *Think Tank Era*, 2019, (27).
- [9] Jia Zhengjun. Exploration of Innovative Rural Elderly Care Models in Shanxi. *Taxation*, 2019, 13(19).
- [10] Chen Tongming, Ma Yan. Discussion on Community Home-based Elderly Care Models in Ningxia. *Ningxia Social Sciences*, 2018(03).
- [11] Hu Mingyu, Luo Xunan. Maintenance Agreement System -- Improvement of a Rural Elderly Care Model. *Journal of Hubei University of Economics (Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2021, 18(03).
- [12] Li Xinying, Li Zhihong. Analysis of a New Socialized Elderly Care Model in the Form of "Public-Private Partnership" -- Taking the Operation of the Ningxia Elderly Service Center as an Example. *China High-Tech Enterprises*, 2015(23).
- [13] Li Changyuan, Zhang Huiping. Practice Models, Real Obstacles, and Solutions for Promoting the Development of Medical Care Combination in Underdeveloped Areas -- Based on Case Studies of Three Cities in Ningxia. *Ningxia Social Sciences*, 2020, (04).
- [14] Wei Xin. Research on Rural Mutual Aid Elderly Care Models under the Background of New Rural Areas. *Heilongjiang Science*, 2022, 13(03).
- [15] Song He, Mu Wei. Building the "Women, Elderly, and Villagers" Model -- Supporting Rural Home-based Elderly Care. *Population and Health*, 2020, (07).