

Practice Exploration of Community Elderly Care Service under the Mode of “Five-Social Linkage”: Taking X Community as an Example

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Abstract: With the increasing aging of China's population, community support has become an important way to relieve the pressure of family support and improve the quality of life of the elderly in their later years. Under this background, the “five-society linkage” model as an innovative community governance model provides a new idea for community old-age. The linkage of the five social groups is the cooperation between the community, social organizations, social workers, social charity funds and community volunteers. Based on the successful practice of X community's social work participation in community elderly care under the five-social linkage model, this paper reveals the important role of the five-social linkage model in community elderly care, and puts forward suggestions for further optimization.

Keywords: Linkage of five social groups; Community pension; Social work

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1. Introduction

Based on China's seventh national census data, the country's total population stands at approximately 1.44 billion individuals. Among this population, 18.70% are aged 60 or older, while around 13.50% are aged 65 or above. In comparison with the sixth national census, the proportion of individuals aged 60 and above has risen by 5.44%, and the proportion of those aged 65 and above has increased by 4.63%. These figures indicate an overall upward trend and a progressively aging society^[1]. As economic and living standards continue to improve, the needs of elderly individuals in China are transitioning from basic survival-oriented requirements to development-oriented demands. To effectively address the challenges posed by an aging population, the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China proposed enhancing policy frameworks aimed at fostering the growth of elderly care services and the elderly care industry, thereby promoting high-quality advancements in elderly care services. Within the broader elderly care service system, the community-based

elderly care model serves as a critical component, playing a vital role in encouraging collaborative involvement among various community stakeholders and delivering more proactive and health-focused elderly care solutions for seniors.

2. The elements of the “five-social linkage”

The five-social linkage model draws on the unique experiences of public health governance while highlighting the significant contributions made by social volunteers and charitable organizations. This enables social workers to address the limitations of the traditional “three-social linkage” framework^[2]. In this paper, the “five-social linkage” model is presented as an innovative approach that uses the needs of community residents as a guiding principle. It positions the community as an integrated service platform, leverages social organizations as service providers, relies on social workers for professional support, engages community volunteers for assistance, and utilizes social charity resources as a guarantee for service delivery. By doing so, it enhances and refines the “three-social linkage” model at both theoretical and practical levels, effectively mobilizing broader societal participation^[3]. Inspired by the five-social linkage framework, social workers embrace the core values of “helping others to help themselves” and actively participate in community elder care as service facilitators. Through the application of professional methodologies, they foster a community atmosphere of respect and care for the elderly, offer diverse services tailored to their needs, and ultimately enhance the quality of life for seniors.

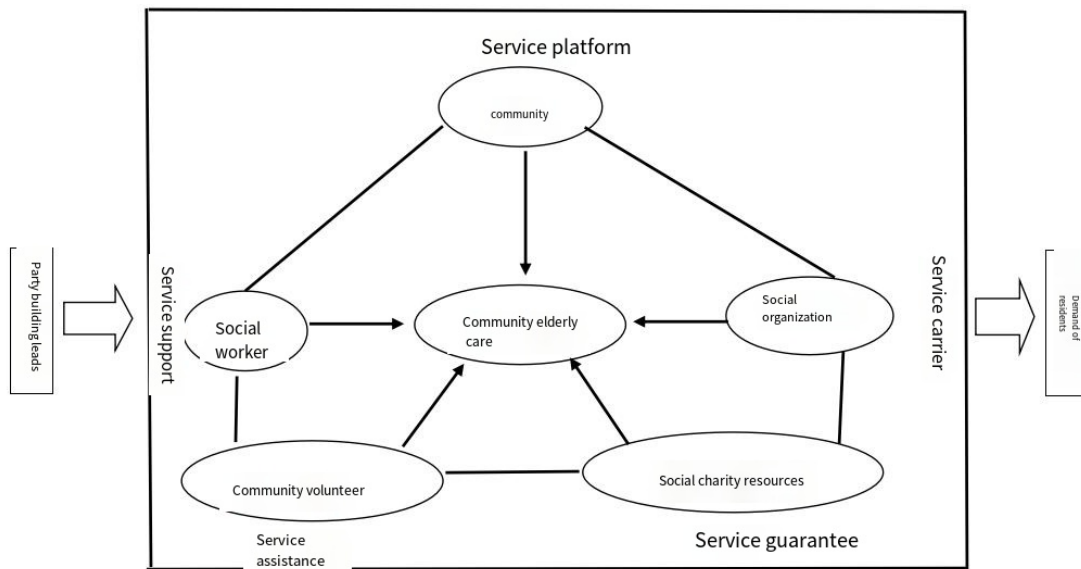


Figure 1. Model of the five social groups’ joint participation in the community for the aged.

2.1. Community as a service platform

The community serves as the foundational component in connecting the five social organizations. It functions not only as a platform that facilitates collaboration among various parties but also acts as the central entity for community activities. The community plays a crucial role in resource integration, event coordination, and service delivery. By leveraging available resources, it establishes facilities such as day care centers, rehabilitation services, and sports centers for the elderly. These facilities offer essential services, including daily care,

recreational activities, and health consultations to meet the needs of the senior population.

2.2. Social organizations as carriers

Social organizations act as bridges and connectors in linking the five social entities, guiding all parties to offer a range of services for elderly individuals within the community. Additionally, these organizations can take on aging-related service projects from either the government or local communities, thereby advancing the standardization and professionalism of such services ^[4]. Through involvement in community-based social organizations, older adults can more effectively engage in community governance and better access community-provided services.

2.3. Social workers as support

Social workers serve as the key professional support within the linkage model of the five social organizations. Throughout the project's execution, they apply their expertise and skills to develop tailored service plans for elderly individuals. Additionally, social workers act as intermediaries, facilitating communication and coordination between residents and neighborhood committees, as well as among residents themselves. This ensures the effective consolidation of resources from various stakeholders, thereby enhancing the overall efficiency of services provided to the elderly population.

2.4. Social charity funds as a guarantee

Social charity funds, which encompass government allocations, donations from society, and welfare funds, play a crucial role in complementing the five-social linkage model. By actively attracting external financial resources, communities can effectively integrate various resources, providing essential financial support and material guarantees for elderly care services. This approach has transformed the long-standing passive and monotonous “blood transfusion” supply into an active and diverse “blood production” supply, ensuring the sustainability and stability of the “Five Societies Linkage” model ^[5].

2.5. Community volunteers for assistance

Community volunteers serve as a supporting force within the collaborative framework of the five social organizations. They represent not only a significant resource for local leaders but also a crucial addition to the professional service workforce. Their involvement infuses community elderly care services with substantial internal momentum ^[6]. Through activities like volunteering and neighborhood assistance, they help address the shortfall in community elderly care staff while offering emotional support to seniors via companionship and care, thereby easing feelings of loneliness and isolation.

3. Practice and exploration of the X community

The X community in Karamay City is an urban community where the primary type of housing consists of affordable units. Overall, the community exhibits the features described as “two shortages and four abundances” (limited jurisdictional resources, fewer co-construction organizations, a higher proportion of low-income groups, retired soldiers, elderly individuals, and children). Most residents in this area belong to subsistence allowance recipients, low-income households, ethnic minority populations, and single-parent families, resulting in a diverse demographic composition.

The X community fully utilizes the “five-social linkage” approach, establishing an innovative social work sharing platform that integrates hub-type entities (such as social work agencies and volunteers), professional teams (like social workers), and promotes community services through innovation. Guided by grassroots Party organizations, the social work station uses the community as its foundational platform, with offices for community social workers and social organizations serving as the operational carriers. This initiative is supported by skilled social workers and specialized social work methodologies, while volunteer services provide valuable supplementary support in delivering social services. As a result, the “five-social linkage” model has been successfully activated, fostering enthusiastic resident participation, strengthening the cohesion between communities and social organizations, and achieving remarkable people-oriented volunteer services.

3.1. Construction of the elderly care service system

Guided by grassroots Party organizations, social work stations establish collaborative practice service roles for the five social groups on a community-based platform. For instance, they create “health management homes” to serve lonely and isolated elderly individuals. These initiatives offer ongoing health management services, maintain records, and monitor health conditions in real-time. Pilot health management programs have been introduced, registering citizens aged 60 and above while providing on-site services from professional social workers for those over 80. Community social organizations are nurtured through community social worker offices and social entities, fostering domestic service volunteer teams that provide in-home haircuts, housekeeping, and psychological counseling to meet the needs of older adults. Leveraging the Tianshan Heart Home Social Work Service Society, efforts focus on developing four key social service organizations, such as the “Yinling Elder Care Service Group.” A variety of community activities, like “Culture Running Xinjiang,” are organized to enhance the spiritual and cultural lives of seniors. The community also conducts case consultations and youth growth groups, emphasizing the mental well-being of the elderly and the development of children. Regular volunteer services act as a valuable supplement. Additionally, a “Red Sunday” service day is established for public convenience, offering services such as haircuts, knife sharpening, and blood pressure measurements to improve the quality of life for older individuals.

3.2. Resource integration of the five social organizations

Party building facilitates the integration of community resources. Fully leverage the central leadership role of Party organizations by integrating community social organizations, volunteers, and charitable resources into a “five-social linkage” framework. This fosters collaboration and collectively enhances community elderly care services. Public charitable resources have been introduced, with coordination involving higher-level departments such as the Civil Affairs Bureau, the Municipal Charity Federation, and the Municipal Culture, Sports, and Tourism Bureau. Over 700 books and magazines were received, while the municipal Lucky Lottery Center donated dozens of umbrellas and sets of volunteer uniforms to support community development and activities. Using the community as a platform, governance has been coordinated and promoted. A “practice service position for the five social groups” was established, transforming eight rooms in the office building into spaces like dance studios, reading rooms, and table tennis rooms at a cost of over 50,000 yuan. These resident activity areas enrich the cultural ambiance of the community and strengthen residents’ sense of belonging. With “red blood cell” party members as the core, the initiative attracts community party members, retired officials, and physically fit older adults to participate. A public service platform is provided to encourage residents to engage in volunteer work. By implementing the “rolling incubation of community social organizations” development strategy, the initiative

has successfully fostered 27 community social organizations across three domains: grassroots governance, social services, and cultural and sports activities ^[7]. These organizations have significantly bolstered residents' capacity for self-governance and have proven indispensable during crucial times, such as public security reviews and emergency situations.

3.3. The cooperation mechanism of the five social organizations

In the “Five-Social Linkage” mechanism, X Community fully leverages the collaborative impact of the five stakeholders. The “two committees” within the community foster mutual support and resource sharing through regular consultation meetings, with assistance and coordination from members of the major Party committees at the street and district levels. During the early stages of projects, social workers engage in communication and negotiation with community party organizations and residents' committees to establish cooperative agreements. They employ professional methodologies to organize events like the Dragon Boat Festival and the Party Building Festival for target service groups, cultivating a positive community environment. A mutually beneficial mechanism titled “engaging in public welfare and showcasing image” is established to encourage residents to join volunteer teams. To further motivate volunteers, X Community has implemented a comprehensive reward system based on volunteer points. By allowing points to be exchanged for daily necessities, residents are incentivized to actively participate in community volunteer services. This approach not only improves the efficiency of volunteer activities but also strengthens resident involvement in community affairs, fostering a favorable scenario of joint construction, co-governance, and shared benefits.

4. Analysis of difficulties and development suggestions

4.1. Analysis of dilemma

4.1.1. Linkage mechanism is not perfect

The connection model of the five social organizations demands strong collaboration and coordinated efforts among different entities. Nevertheless, in practical implementation, the ambiguity in responsibility distribution among primary parties, coupled with inadequate communication and a flawed incentive system, leads to an imperfect linkage mechanism. This, in turn, negatively impacts the efficiency and outcomes of the services provided ^[8]. The involvement of multiple parties might introduce challenges in coordination, necessitating the establishment of an efficient communication framework.

4.1.2. Resources are not allocated properly

Social resources play a crucial role in ensuring the efficient functioning of the collaboration model among the five social organizations. Nevertheless, factors such as low resident engagement within communities, insufficient trust, and the absence of an effective resource integration system have led to a scarcity of social resources. This shortage has, in turn, impacted the effectiveness of the collaboration model in community elderly care services. Further study and investigation are required to determine how to more effectively consolidate and make use of these resources, thereby enhancing the sustainability and efficacy of the project.

4.1.3. Uneven service quality

The shortage of professionals in community elderly care services hinders the ability to satisfy the increasingly demanding needs for such services. This sector encompasses a wide range of specialized areas, including

medicine, nursing, psychology, and law, all of which require staff with high levels of professional competence. Furthermore, the development of social organizations remains underdeveloped. As a critical component connecting the five types of social organizations, the progress of these entities significantly impacts both the quality and sustainability of community elderly care services. Nevertheless, currently, social organizations often face challenges such as limited size, inadequate funding, and restricted service capabilities, which prevent them from fully realizing their potential within community elderly care services. In X community, 70% of community-based social organizations primarily focus on cultural and sports activities, necessitating a transformation into life-service and community-affairs organizations tailored to this demographic.

4.2. Development suggestions

4.2.1. Change the concept of governance and enhance governance capacity

Community governance focuses on the administration of public affairs through collaboration and dialogue, addressing the shortcomings or inefficiencies of government and market mechanisms in the distribution of social resources. While facilitating the shift of government governance from a management-oriented approach to a governance-focused one, it is also necessary to upgrade the underlying concepts^[9]. The “integration of five social organizations” represents a process where the government, communities, and social workers fulfill their respective roles, forming part of a multi-party system. The case of Community X demonstrates that Party-building leadership serves as the central driving force for advancing community governance. By engaging residents in diverse activities and promoting policy implementation, Party organizations have significantly enhanced resident satisfaction and refined the social governance framework. Leveraging modern scientific and technological advancements, community-based elderly care services are provided based on local conditions. Technologies such as the Internet of Things, big data, and cloud computing are integrated to establish a smart elderly care platform. This platform collects and analyzes real-time information regarding the daily lives, health, and safety of seniors, thereby improving the quality of elderly care services^[10].

4.2.2. Improve the market mechanism and invite social workers to participate

To foster the integrated development of social work and community elderly care services, it is essential to prioritize the needs of financially disadvantaged disabled, elderly, and uncared-for seniors by leveraging both government-purchased services and direct service provision. A collaborative platform should be established, engaging the government, enterprises, social organizations, and social workers to enhance information sharing and resource coordination^[11]. Various methods, including project collaboration and service procurement, should be utilized to ensure that social work services permeate all market sectors, offering tailored and professional support to market participants^[12]. By refining the market mechanisms for social workers’ involvement in community elderly care, market vitality can be enhanced, resource allocation improved, and the diverse needs of the elderly better met, thereby promoting the sustainable and healthy development of elderly care services.

4.2.3. Strengthen the linkage of subjects through community joint meetings

The primary challenge for the collaborative model involving the five cooperatives is establishing an effective coordination mechanism among them. To address this, the Tianshanxin Social Work Station has developed a community joint meeting system. This involves convening monthly meetings with representatives from at least three relevant entities to discuss key issues. During these meetings, social workers present the outcomes of their previous month’s efforts, highlight major challenges encountered, outline plans for the upcoming month, and

identify areas requiring assistance. The presence of leaders from these entities facilitates swift problem-solving and decision-making. By implementing this joint meeting system, the efficiency and relevance of collaboration among the various stakeholders are enhanced, thereby ensuring the effectiveness of services provided by the five social groups.

4.2.4. Cultivate professional talents and develop local talents

The advancement of professional social work services relies on the collaborative efforts of both specialists and local talent. To enhance both the number and caliber of social work professionals, it is crucial to intensify training and educational initiatives aimed at boosting their expertise and capabilities. Additionally, by recruiting qualified social work professionals and forming dedicated teams, we can more effectively establish a robust social work professional corps and deliver superior social work services ^[13].

During the execution of services, social workers can assume the role of educators, developing a pool of talents within the community who possess specialized service capabilities. Additionally, they can foster and support volunteer groups focused on elderly care. Building on this, there should be a gradual establishment of community-based social organizations. Consequently, an integrated elderly social service network will emerge, combining the efforts of social workers, employees from elderly care facilities, and volunteers. This network will further leverage disciplinary traits and operational outcomes to enhance social services for the elderly ^[14].

5. Summary

In summary, the integrated model of the five cooperatives is driven by the needs of community residents. It operates with the entire community as a service platform, social organizations as service providers, social workers as service supporters, community volunteers as supplementary service assistants, and social charity resources as service guarantors. Guided by Party building, this model aims to achieve high-quality development in community elderly care services ^[15]. However, the current integration mechanism among these five social entities remains imperfect, and its closed-loop operation requires further optimization. In the context of community elderly care, this integrated model faces challenges such as a shortage of professional talent, inefficient resource allocation, inconsistent service quality, and an underdeveloped coordination mechanism. To ensure the effective operation and sustainable development of this integrated model in community elderly care services, collaborative efforts from multiple stakeholders are essential. These include the government, communities, social organizations, social workers, community volunteers, and social charity resources. Specific measures that can be implemented include: (1) transforming governance philosophies and enhancing governance capabilities; (2) establishing and refining market mechanisms to encourage social worker participation; (3) strengthening coordination among various parties through community joint meetings; and (4) cultivating and attracting professional talent to bolster the local talent pool. By implementing these strategies, the integrated model of the five social entities can play a more significant role in community elderly care services, ultimately providing higher-quality care for the elderly population.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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