

Research on the Construction of a Diversified Elderly Care Service System for Empty Nest Elders in Rural China Under the Vision of Rural Revitalization

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Received 12 September 2024; accepted 23 November 2024
Published online 26 December 2024

Abstract

With the advent of China's aging society, the problems of an aging population, an increasingly elderly population, and empty nests are unavoidable, particularly prominent in rural areas. Based on a preliminary analysis of the current situation through field visits and literature reviews, this study summarizes the existing deficiencies and problems in current rural elderly care policies in China. By focusing on six key aspects—strengthening grassroots efforts, revitalizing local culture, enhancing organizational capacity, attracting the involvement of local elites, and emphasizing talent cultivation—this research proposes a diversified elderly care system for rural empty nesters. This system will be based on government safety nets, family care, and individual responsibility, with the active participation of social forces, aiming to better meet the growing multi-level and diverse health and elderly care needs of rural residents.

Key words: Diversified elderly care service system; Empty nest elders; Rural revitalization

Huang, N. (2024). Research on the Construction of a Diversified Elderly Care Service System for Empty Nest Elders in Rural China Under the Vision of Rural Revitalization. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 27(2), 47-52. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/13680>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/13680>

INTRODUCTION

China has entered a phase of rapid aging, and the situation of aging and empty nesting in rural populations is unprecedentedly severe. With the proposal of rural

revitalization strategy, the dilemma of Care Service for empty nest elders in rural areas has become a concern of increasing interest among scholars. The “Rural Revitalization Strategy Plan” emphasizes the continuous improvement of elderly care service capacity in rural areas within the overall goal of modernizing agriculture and rural areas, providing an important opportunity for the development of a multi-level rural elderly care service system. How to provide low-cost, high-efficiency, and high-quality elderly care services for rural elderly has become an urgent task. Therefore, this paper aims to conduct a study on the construction of a diversified elderly care service system for empty nest elders in rural areas in the context of rural revitalization, leveraging the advantages of rural local culture and exploring the optimization path for training a professional local elderly care team.

1. CHALLENGES FACED BY ELDERLY CARE SERVICES FOR EMPTY NEST ELDERS IN RURAL CHINA

As the degree of aging in China continues to deepen, the characteristics of high age and empty nesting among the elderly population become more prominent, and the demand for multi-level and diverse health and elderly care services for the elderly is growing, posing a more severe challenge to elderly health services and guarantees, which are mainly manifested in the following aspects:

1.1 The Urgent Need of Improvement of the Elderly Care Security Mechanism for Empty Nest Elders in Rural Areas

Compared to urban elderly care construction, the rural elderly care industry has not yet formed a certain scale and is still in a dispersed pilot stage. Due to the lack of top-level planning and policy support from government departments in rural areas, elderly care services for empty

nest elders are difficult to obtain support from big data and modern technology. The mismatch of information leads to a disconnection between the supply and demand of elderly care services, which does not meet the actual needs of empty nest elders in rural areas. A social diversified investment mechanism has not been established, and the participation of social diversification entities in elderly care services for empty nest elders in rural areas has not been fully mobilized; a dynamic growth mechanism for financial input has not been established, failing to provide momentum and protection for the development of elderly care for empty nest elders in rural areas.

1.2 The Improvement of Government Elderly Care Services for Empty Nest Elders

Although the government has begun to provide a series of elderly care services, including insurance services, benefit distribution, regular visits, special care and centralized support, meal assistance, and entertainment services, there are still many limitations. First, the coverage of government elderly care services is still not extensive enough, and many elderly people live alone in rural areas without gaining due attention and care from the government; Second, the quality of elderly care services provided by the government is not high, and many elderly people in nursing homes or centralized support institutions face issues such as insufficient staff and low service quality; Third, the government's elderly care system is not yet perfect, and many elderly people face difficulties in seeking medical help when needed.

1.3 A Shortage of Professional Technology and Talent Reserves for Elderly Care Services for Empty Nest Elders in Rural Areas

At present, China is actively designing products suitable for the elderly and promoting new formats of elderly care services. However, the development of elderly care products requires a significant investment of funds and human resources from the government and enterprises, but the return on investment is not high, especially in rural areas, where the benefits are even smaller. This leads to limited investment from the government and enterprises, and a relative shortage of professional personnel in rural elderly care services. Most existing service personnel urgently need to improve their professional skills and elderly care capabilities, with issues such as older age, lower education levels, high mobility, and weak nursing capabilities. This is mainly due to the high intensity of rural elderly care work, low salary treatment, high psychological pressure, and low social status, making it difficult to attract high-end composite talents.

1.4 The Low Participation of Multiple Entities in Elderly Care Services for Empty Nest Elders in Rural Areas

At present, elderly care services for empty nest elders in rural areas have not yet formed a pattern of active

participation by multiple entities, and there is a lack of coordination among multiple entities. The reasons mainly include the following aspects: First, the family structure tends to be small and empty-nested, and many families find it difficult to provide daily care and spiritual care for the elderly, leading to partial failure of family elderly care; Second, the government's excessive intervention in capital. The government should be the leader of rural elderly care services, but it intervenes throughout as a direct provider, controlling the supply of funds, professional technology, and elderly care information for rural elderly care services; Third, the market lacks motivation to participate, and it is difficult for individual rural elderly care institutions and elderly care product manufacturing companies invested by social capital such as enterprises to obtain preferences and subsidies, with the input and return being disproportionate, leading to market failure; Fourth, rural communities lack elderly care institutions and even more investment in intelligent public infrastructure, leading to fragmentation of rural elderly care resources and community failure; Fifth, social organizations, including elderly care consultants, volunteers, emotional carers, and legal aid providers, mainly rely on the government support and meager paid services to live on, hence the participation is not high.

1.5 The Solidification of Family Elderly Care and the Weakening Function of Family Elderly Care

Raising children to prevent old age, and paying filial piety to the parents are the core meaning of traditional elderly care culture and an important value in Chinese culture. Traditional elderly care culture occupies the main position, and family elderly care is still the common model for empty nest elders in rural areas. However, with the rapid development of the economy and the influence of material economy, the concepts of filial piety culture and parental support among the younger generation have been impacted. Most children choose to live separately from their parents, unable to meet the needs of the elderly for home-based elderly care. In addition, work pressure and the pace of modern society also make many children lack enough time to take care of their parents. Therefore, we need to pay more attention to traditional elderly care culture, but also need to continuously innovate and seek new solutions to enable the elderly to enjoy a better quality of life in their later years.

1.6 Insufficient Attention to the Spiritual Level of Elderly Care for Empty Nest Elders in Rural Areas

With the continuous advancement of urbanization, an increasing number of young people are leaving rural areas to seek better lives in big cities. This geographical separation makes the lives of empty nest elders in rural areas extremely lonely. At the same time, because the elderly are not proficient in operating electronic devices, do not want to disturb their children's work, and do

not want them to worry, they rarely take the initiative to contact their children, leading to a relative lack of emotional communication, making the psychological state of empty nest elders more lonely and anxious. In addition, the rural area's emphasis on spiritual culture is not high enough, resulting in insufficient coverage of village-level public service facilities and collective activities, leaving empty nest elders lacking a platform to communicate with their peers. Coupled with the generally low education level of empty nest elders in rural areas, they cannot actively obtain online public services through newspapers, the internet, and other media. This makes their spiritual and cultural deficiencies more severe, making them feel lonelier and more helpless.

2. CONSTRUCTION OF A DIVERSIFIED ELDERLY CARE SERVICE SYSTEM FOR EMPTY NEST ELDERNS IN RURAL CHINA UNDER THE VISION OF RURAL REVITALIZATION

2.1 Strengthening Village-Based Forces to Ensure the Precise Implementation of Elderly Care Security Policies

2.1.1 Strengthening Village-Based Service for Elderly Care

In the field of elderly care services, the elderly care departments at the town and village levels are the groups that directly provide elderly care services. It is necessary to strengthen the assessment and supervision of elderly care department staff to ensure that work is more meticulous and considerate. At the same time, to ensure that elderly care policies are publicized, it is necessary to implement them without any discount and without leaving anyone out. The government should publicize elderly care policies through various channels, allowing the elderly and their families to understand the content and scope of the policies, allowing more people to understand the importance and value of elderly care services, and encouraging more people to participate in the field of elderly care services.

2.1.2 Scientifically Constructing "Party Building + Rural Mutual Aid Elderly Care Service Centers"

Government departments should increase investment in elderly care service centers, build mutual aid elderly care service centers in combination with the allocation from higher levels and self-raised funds at the village level. Based on the actual situation of the village, the government should scientifically select sites in villages where empty nest elders are concentrated, and ensure that at least one-Party Building + Rural Mutual Aid Elderly Care Service Center is built in each village. For the elderly care meal function, a combination of

allocation from higher levels, village-level subsidies, personal self-raising, and social donations should be adopted for operation and management. Empty nest elders should be given priority in services to ensure their basic living needs are met, ensuring that the elderly can enjoy high-quality and affordable elderly meal services (Wei, 2020).

2.1.3 Organizing and Launching Paired Support Service Activities

Village group officials should carefully arrange and pay timely and regular visits to the elderly living alone, providing paired support conveniently and visit daily to chat with the elderly, ensuring that their needs, urgent matters, and difficulties are resolved in a timely manner.

2.2 Strengthening Organizational Construction, and Using Grid Services to Promote Neighborhood Mutual Aid in Elderly Care

2.2.1 Implementing Party Member Grid Services

To better manage rural communities and continuously improve service quality, grid management models have been introduced in recent years. Establishing an accurate grid management system is a prerequisite for realizing grid management. When establishing a grid management system, grids should be scientifically set up based on geographical location, population size, socio-economic factors, etc. The implementation of grid management requires the full play of the role of grid workers, who are responsible for daily management and service work within the grid, need to reflect community issues in a timely manner, provide refined services to the community, and should also regularly visit the elderly living alone in rural areas to strengthen care and services for the elderly (Chen, 2022).

2.2.2 Precisely Selecting and Assigning Grid Workers

The appointment of grid workers should be based on practicality, following the principle of "easy to manage, easy to serve, easy to concentrate, and easy to activate". The appointment of grid workers needs to consider various factors, such as the skills of party members, service capabilities, and the needs of service recipients.

2.3 Emphasizing Talent Cultivation to Build a Local Professional Elderly Care Team

To achieve rural revitalization, elderly care services for the rural elderly living alone must be put on the right track, and it is imperative to build a relatively professional local elderly care team. Therefore, by drawing on the experience of mutual aid in elderly care and the development of the social work industry, it is feasible to value and cultivate local talents in elderly care during the process of rural revitalization.

2.3.1 Recruiting Elderly Care Volunteers and Conducting Professional Systematic Training and Assessment

The government should arrange teachers to the village,

and the village committee should set up training bases to strictly select qualified applicants, who should undergo special training according to specific job categories to comprehensively improve their service awareness, professional level, and quality. To ensure service quality, trainees must obtain vocational skill certificates for elderly care workers before they can take up their posts.

2.3.2 Following the “Proximity Principle” in Employment to Make Rural Elderly Care Down-to-Earth

For positions with general professional requirements such as elderly care workers and conversational companions, the employment issue can be solved through the following channels: First, recruiting young volunteers from towns or administrative villages for professional capacity training and regular volunteer service activities. In volunteer service activities, young volunteers can help the elderly with things within their capabilities, such as sweeping the floor, going shopping, and accompanying the elderly in conversation, which may seem trivial but can bring endless warmth and care to the elderly. Second, recruiting low-age healthy elderly from the town or village to join the elderly care team, which is a mutual benefit in the process of elderly care, such as purchasing goods and taking care of daily life, which can not only alleviate the living pressure of the elderly but also make low-age healthy elderly feel their value and presence. Third, building a local, familiar rural elderly care team for the elderly living alone. These service teams are composed of local people who are familiar with the local situation and understand the needs of the elderly, and can provide better services for the elderly (Chen, 2021).

2.3.3 Broadening the Supply Channels for Service Talents and Increasing the Talent Reserve for Rural Revitalization

For positions with higher professional requirements, such as institutional operations and medical positions, the government should encourage public and private schools, associations, and other third-party social organizations to get involved and actively cultivate various professional talents to go to the countryside. The government should also collaborate with local vocational colleges to implement “order-style” talent training and targeted distribution. The government should encourage colleges and universities to offer specialized courses in elderly care, health care, and nursing, to cultivate talents in elderly care, professional social work, spiritual care, and volunteers, to achieve standardized and professional care services for the rural elderly left behind, to train rural doctors to bring medical resources down to the countryside, to improve the level of rural medical care, and to sign family doctors for the elderly left behind, extending medical services to their homes.

2.4 Attracting Hometown Talents to Give Back and Mobilize Social Participation to Improve Elderly Care Services

2.4.1 Utilizing Market Vitality to Increase Rural Elderly Care Resources

The government should support public elderly care institutions to adopt new models such as “public construction and private operation”, attract various brand elderly care institutions to get involved, and provide certain construction and operation subsidies, ensuring that the elderly can afford it and that institutional elderly care can supply it.

2.4.2 Attracting Hometown Gentry to Give Back and Encouraging Their Return to Hometowns for Entrepreneurship and Development

Firstly, the government should leverage social forces to improve elderly care services for the rural elderly living alone, where the role of hometown gentry is indispensable. Then, the government should establish a roster of hometown gentry and wealth leaders, take the opportunity of festivals to actively contact, hold hometown talent talks, collect opinions and suggestions for hometown development, and provide policy support for the development of hometown talents. Through these activities, the connection with hometown gentry can be greatly strengthened, thus attracting them to provide resource support for the rural elderly living alone and village development.

2.4.3 Increasing Publicity Efforts in Promoting Rural Revitalization

With the implementation of the national rural revitalization strategy, it is very necessary to increase publicity efforts to ensure its smooth progress. However, it has been found that some workers and farmers are not very familiar with the actual implementation process and policy contents of the rural revitalization strategy. In publicity work, elderly care-related activities can be held to widely publicize the situation of elderly care services for the rural elderly living alone to society.

2.5 Revitalizing Rural Industries and Enhancing the Self-Care Ability of Individuals and Families for Elderly Care

2.5.1 Deeply Analyzing the Reasons for the Empty Nest and Clarifying the Main Responsibilities for Elderly Care

The main responsibilities for the elderly care of the rural elderly living alone are the elderly themselves and their families, which is a widely accepted fact. In rural areas, the elderly living alone face more severe elderly care dilemmas than in cities. Therefore, directly helping rural areas to become wealthy and increasing income is the main way to solve the elderly care dilemma of the rural elderly living alone. Rural areas can improve income levels and employment opportunities by developing their

own industries, thereby bettering the quality of life for the elderly living alone. By strengthening the development of rural industries, more employment opportunities can be created, and farmers' income can be increased, allowing the elderly living alone to have better living conditions (Zhu Hao, 2022). In addition, the government should increase its support for rural areas and promote the development of rural industries by implementing preferential policies and providing financial subsidies. The government can also encourage enterprises to invest in rural areas to provide more employment opportunities for farmers.

2.5.2 Developing Rural Characteristic Industries, Guiding Farmers to Become Wealthy and Increasing Their Income.

Currently, rural revitalization and the development of village collective economy industries are rapidly gaining momentum. The development of village collective industries has become a focus of current industrial development work, requiring government active planning based on actual village conditions. To fully lay out the collective economy, each village should strengthen the village-level collective economy through services such as tourism to promote income, resource activation to ensure income, and group development to stabilize income. Each village should actively develop the village-level collective economy, creating more employment opportunities and income channels for farmers, allowing farmers to enjoy the dividends of development at their doorstep.

2.6 Revitalizing Local Culture and Promoting the Excellent Traditional Virtues of Loving and Respecting the Elderly

2.6.1 Changing Traditional Concepts and Revitalizing the Inheritance of Local Culture

Local culture has a profound impact on the elderly care of the rural elderly living alone. The rural elderly living alone are deeply influenced by traditional culture and it is difficult to shake the fixed thinking of raising children to prevent old age and home-based elderly care. To break this dilemma, it must be combined with the current revitalization of local culture. The revitalization of local culture needs to start from multiple aspects. First, the government should increase its protection and support for rural culture, build more cultural facilities, and improve the visibility and influence of rural culture. Second, family education is also very important. Parents should value traditional cultural education, let children understand the history, culture, and traditional customs of their hometown, and cultivate the traditional virtue of honoring parents. Finally, all sectors of society should also strengthen the promotion of local culture, let more people understand and identify with rural culture, and promote the development and inheritance of rural culture.

2.6.2 Inheriting Fine Traditions to Foster a Harmonious Atmosphere of Respect for the Elderly

In the process of advancing the rural revitalization strategy, it is essential to emphasize and promote the excellent traditional virtues of the Chinese nation, such as loving, respecting, filial piety towards and assisting the elderly. These traditional cultures are unique to the Chinese nation and constitute a precious treasure of our country. By revitalizing local culture, the government can better promote and pass on these traditional cultures, allowing the younger generation to re-embrace the education of "filial piety" and continuously strengthen the emotional bonds between the elderly and their children and grandchildren. At the same time, the government also need to engage in dialogue between ancient and modern times to achieve unique cultural leadership, thereby promoting the enhancement of elderly care services in the new era.

3. SUMMARY

With the advent of the silver age in our country, the issues of aging, high-age, and empty-nesting have become unavoidable, with rural elderly care issues being particularly prominent. Based on the investigation and analysis of the current situation, this study clarifies the connotations and boundaries of rural revitalization, empty-nest elderly, and diversified elderly care services. By identifying existing deficiencies and problems, the study focuses on six aspects: strengthening village-based forces, enhancing organizational construction, valuing talent cultivation, attracting the support of local gentry, revitalizing rural industries, and local culture. It aims to form a diversified elderly care system for rural empty-nest elderly that is underpinned by government guarantees, based on family elderly care, centered on individual responsibility, and involving the participation of social forces. This system is designed to better meet the growing multi-level and diverse health and elderly care service needs of rural seniors.

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