

Study on China's Time Bank Mutual Care Model for the Elderly from the Perspective of Social Capital Theory

Wei Zhang^{1,2,a,*}, Jiawei Cao^{1,b}, Linjun Zhang^{1,c}

¹School of Economics and Trade, Nanchang Institute of Technology, Nanchang, China

²Management Science and Engineering Research Center, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, China

^awzhangedu@163.com, ^bcaojiawei200315@163.com, ^czhanglinjunone@163.com

*Corresponding author

Abstract: Time bank mutual care model of elderly care, as a new model of elderly service, is an exploration and integration of social resources for the elderly. Based on the perspective of social capital theory, the participation network is the platform for the realization of time bank mutual care, the reciprocity norm is the guarantee for its operation, and social trust is the driving force for its development. From the perspective of the realistic operation of this new type of elderly care model, there are still certain dilemmas in its development. Therefore, it is necessary to start from the three levels of network scope, institutional standardization and trust foundation to promote the sustainable development of the time bank mutual care model of elderly care in the future.

Keywords: Social capital, Time bank, Mutual care for the elderly

1. Introduction

According to the 7th National Population Census released by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the proportion of people aged 60 and above in China's total population has reached 18.70%. From a demographic point of view, in the past 10 years, China has experienced the first stage of rapid population aging. Next China will have to deal with an even more rapid period of population aging^[1]. As the demand for social services for the elderly continues to expand, how to meet the demand for elderly services with limited resources is a challenge that cannot be ignored in the course of future economic and social development. Against this backdrop, the time bank mutual care model for the elderly was created. Time bank is essentially a platform for the conversion of resources across time and without boundaries based on goodwill and institutions, and participants continue to form the accumulation of resources for old age by quantifying the value of the labor they create in units of time^[2]. The development of time bank is an innovative exploration of mutual social support for the elderly, which has greatly facilitated the development of mutual support for the elderly. The development of the time bank mutual care model for the elderly can, to a certain extent, alleviate the pressure on the elderly in society. According to practical experience, the time bank mutual care model has become an important model for expanding social pension services in many regions, and an important carrier for different social groups to explore their own values and promote the culture of social mutual assistance^[3]. Regarding the research on the time bank mutual care model, most of the existing literature focuses on the perspective of institutional design, paying attention to the rationality of the time bank mutual care model, its current operation and its future development. This paper attempts to provide new ideas for the construction and development of the time bank mutual care model from the perspective of social capital.

Social capital is an immaterial resource in society that has become a hot research topic in the social sciences in recent years. Patnam defines social capital as "referring to the characteristics of social organisations, such as trust, norms, and networks, which enable them to improve the efficiency of society by fostering co-operation"^[4]. According to the theory of social capital, the establishment of a management system for modern society is essentially an integration of the elements that make up society. It is capable of promoting the formation of a social framework of networked interaction among the elements on the basis of common interests and the establishment of a multi-channel, highly efficient and standardized mechanism of expression, participation, coordination and cooperation, thereby realizing a high degree of compatibility between instrumental and value rationality in the process of

social management^[5]. Based on this view, there is a high degree of fit and logical correlation between the mutual care model for the elderly and social capital theory. The paper starts from the three levels of participation network, reciprocity norms, and social trust, clarifies the inner mechanism of the role of the time bank mutual care model in social pensions, as well as the realistic dilemmas faced by China's time bank at the current stage of development, and propose effective paths for its sustainable development in the future.

2. Mechanism of Action

2.1. Participation Networks: the Realization Platform

The participation networks are the platforms for the realisation of the time bank mutual care model. Participation networks are made up of associations between subjects such as individuals, organisations and institutions and can be divided into horizontal and vertical networks^[4]. Horizontal networks refer to participatory networks in which subjects of equal status and power are linked; vertical networks refer to participatory networks in which asymmetrical relationships and unequal subjects are linked. In the practice of the time bank mutual care model, the elderly are connected to each other through horizontal networks, and the elderly are connected to the government, social organisations, etc. through vertical networks. Participation networks provide an important foundation for social capital, as they build a platform for internal communication and feedback for elderly groups participating in mutual care. At the same time, the participation networks also connect the government, social organisations, communities, residents and other subjects together, and the information, support, trust and resources formed among the participation networks constitute the social capital of mutual care for the elderly. On the one hand, the horizontal network, as a foundational platform for the participation of older groups in time bank, establishes information channels and communication platforms for older groups, and becomes an important carrier for the cultivation of inter-group trust relationships, while at the same time being able to enhance the sense of well-being and existence of older groups in the process. On the other hand, vertical networks can encourage the participation of various social organisations in the construction of mutual care platforms, promote the provision of more support by the government, enterprises, social organisations, volunteers and other multi-dimensional entities, and reduce the cost of social care.

2.2. Reciprocity Norms: Operational Security

Reciprocity norms are the guarantee for the functioning of the time bank mutual care model. Social norms are one of the elements of social capital formation, a set of commonly observed standards, both formal and informal, constructed on the basis of participation networks. As time bank is centred on a model of mutual care, essentially a form of service with autonomy and reciprocity, its social norms place greater emphasis on a norm of reciprocity. With the development and expansion of the mutual care participation network, relying solely on credit among participating members is highly subjective and discretionary, making it difficult to sustain the continued development of the time bank and prone to collective action dilemmas, which require constraints on the behavioural norms of participating members. The viability of the time bank mutual care model of mutual support for the elderly must be based on mutual benefit, and the healthy operation and development of this mutual benefit model must rely on the balance of institutional norms. On the one hand, only by constructing reciprocity norms can we ensure the orderly operation of mutual care and overcome the collective action dilemma in the process of mutual care. Corresponding laws, regulations, policies and institutional design can promote the emergence of benign reciprocal behaviours, promote more cooperation among members of participating organisations, and ensure the formation and implementation of reciprocal mechanisms. On the other hand, reciprocity norms have an incentive and guiding role, which can consolidate the functioning of the participating networks, strengthen the trust of each subject, form the benign development of the elderly care system, and improve the quality of mutual care.

2.3. Social Trust: an Engine for Development

Social trust is a key driver for the development of the time bank mutual care model. Social trust includes special trust based on relationships and general trust based on institutions^[6]. Special trust includes trust arising on the basis of blood, kinship, etc., and universal trust includes trust arising on the basis of law, institutions, etc. As the time bank itself offers a pure credit product without any collateral,

the model operates on the basis of trust, making the trust relationship between the participating members a key element in ensuring the sustainability of the pension model. Social trust can link and integrate individual and overall interests, form social capital, and act on the development of mutual care in old age, which is closely related to the mechanism of participation networks and reciprocity norms. On the one hand, effective participation networks and reciprocity norms can facilitate inter-subjective cooperation and promote collective action, which in turn leads to social trust. On the other hand, without social trust among participating members, participation networks cannot be sustained and it is difficult to develop agreed reciprocity norms. The level of trust between subjects can directly affect the frequency of interactions between subjects and the willingness to organise participation, which in turn affects the participation network. At the same time, the formation of reciprocity norms must be achieved on the basis of enhanced trust. Norms that lack a foundation of trust will lose their credibility and momentum for development. Through the establishment of social trust, it can lead to collective action among participating members and increase the participation rate of mutual care for the elderly, thus becoming a driving force for the sustainable development of mutual care for the elderly.

3. Development Dilemma in China

3.1. Insufficient Social Participation

Insufficient social participation is the greatest resistance to the development of the time bank mutual care model. Time bank cannot function without a close network of participants, but currently, in China, there is insufficient participation in both horizontal and vertical networks. On the one hand, older groups have less initiative to participate in time banking. Elderly groups are influenced by traditional Chinese thinking about old age and do not participate actively enough in the practice of the mutual care model for the elderly. Although the model of mutual care for the elderly has been developing in China for some time, and a certain amount of publicity and pilot work has been carried out, in some urban and rural areas, it is still a novelty, and public awareness is not high. At the same time, there is still room for improvement in the system design, theoretical research and real-life technology of time bank, and the immaturity of the mutual care model itself has made it not yet widely accepted among social groups. On the other hand, the awareness of participation of various social actors is weak, and the number of people who actually participate in the mutual care model is limited. The main participants of the time bank involve relevant government departments, social organisations, enterprises, volunteers and so on. Only with the joint efforts and active input of all parties can the effective operation and sustainable operation of the time bank be ensured. However, due to the heterogeneity of goals and unclear functional boundaries among multiple subjects, the participation of various subjects is insufficient, and even if some of them are involved, there is the phenomenon of "participation without cooperation", which affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the social network.

3.2. Lack of Institutional Safeguards

The lack of institutional safeguards constrains the sustainability of the development of the time bank mutual care model for the elderly. The implementation of the model of mutual care for the elderly must be accompanied by sound reciprocity norms, and the reciprocity norms must rely on clear institutional safeguards. The lack of unified policies and regulations to promote the development of voluntary services for the elderly is one of the fundamental reasons for the slow development of time bank in China, which also makes the public lack a sense of identity and trust in time bank^[7]. On the one hand, the boundaries of the responsibilities of various social actors are blurred. There is a lack of clarity as to the main parties involved in promoting the implementation of the mutual care model for the elderly, as well as a lack of clarity as to the responsibility for underwriting protection in the process of implementation. On the other hand, there is insufficient matching of the systems related to mutual care for the elderly, and the current construction of the regulatory and institutional systems for mutual care for the elderly is not yet perfect, and in general lags behind the economic and social development. The supporting system is backward when it comes to concrete implementation, and there is also a lack of system design based on the actual situation in different regions, which is mainly reflected in the lack of top-level design, policies and regulations, credit guarantee mechanisms and supporting rules. The time bank mutual care model for the elderly is still in its initial development and exploration period, and needs proper guidance from top-down policies and regulations. If there is a long-term lack of uniform norms, it will directly affect the benign operation and development of the mutual benefit

model. In turn, it will affect the construction of the participation network, which is not conducive to the formation of a trust mechanism, and ultimately impede the sustainable and stable development of mutual-help elderly services.

3.3. Existence of Trust Crisis

The crisis of trust has led to a lack of momentum in the development of the time bank mutual care model. The mutual care model must develop under the auspices of social trust. However, due to limited public awareness and the lack of institutional safeguards, the public generally does not have enough trust in the mutual care model, and there is a crisis of trust. On the one hand, there is a crisis of trust between time bank organisations and older people. Elderly people have low credibility towards unfamiliar organisations and are resistant to unfamiliar models and environments, while social organisations providing elderly care services may also have problems such as dishonesty and poor service quality, which creates a great deal of difficulty in establishing a trust mechanism. On the other hand, there is also a crisis of trust between various subjects such as the government, social organisations and enterprises. The main manifestations of this are the relationship of mistrust between the upper and lower levels of government, the relationship of mistrust between the government and the ability of social organisations to implement, the relationship of mistrust between the government and the purpose of the organisational behaviour of enterprises, and the relationship of mistrust between social organisations and enterprises in the competition, and so on. The combined effect of these crises of trust will lead to the slow development of the mutual care model. For example, some governments have distrust in the management and service capabilities of social organisations and may set certain thresholds and conditions for such organisations, thus making it difficult for many emerging social organisations to enter the field of practice. The existence of trust crisis affects the breadth and depth of social participation, which in turn leads to collective action dilemmas and makes the time bank mutual care model for the elderly less endogenous.

4. Sustainable Pathways

4.1. Improving Social Participation Networks and Expanding Coverage

To overcome the dilemma of insufficient social participation in time bank, it is necessary to improve the horizontal and vertical networks of social participation and expand the coverage of the network, so as to increase the participation rate of the members of society and fully stimulate the participation function of the members of society. Instead of being closed, loose, disorganised and self-interested, the participation networks formed by time bank is organised and reflects openness, closeness, interaction, order and sharing^[8]. On the one hand, the participation network is a starting point to increase the participation and the initiative to participate in mutual care for the elderly. The breadth of the participation networks, the comprehensiveness of the network's output items, and the sophistication of the network's means of interaction influence the level of social participation to a greater or lesser extent. To enhance the breadth of the participation network, encourage community self-governance organisations and service organisations to provide participation platforms for elderly groups, and broaden the ways to participate in mutual care for the elderly. At the same time, the mainstream media have been used in innovative ways of publicity to establish a good reputation and image externally and to mobilise wide participation in mutual care for the elderly. It is necessary to improve the comprehensiveness of the network's output projects, focus on the training of the service team's professional skills, and improve the professionalism of elderly services. It is also necessary to ensure the advanced nature of the means of network interaction, and to continuously improve the information construction of the time bank network, so as to enhance the effectiveness of mutual pension services. On the other hand, emphasis should be placed on the main bodies involved and the coverage of the main bodies should be expanded. The Government, the market and the community should make concerted efforts to fully mobilise resources and promote the healthy development of time bank. The operation of time bank cannot rely solely on the community, but must form a unified and joint network over a wider area to enable the exchange of users' service time. It is necessary to take diversified, specialised and large-scale mutual care for the elderly as the driving force, and on the basis of expanding the participation network, to enhance the cooperation of the pluralistic main bodies, so as to achieve mutual care for the elderly in terms of effectiveness, quality and quantity.

4.2. Optimising the Design of Supporting Systems for Sound Social Norms

In order to maximise the effectiveness of the governance of the time bank mutual care model for the elderly, the corresponding supporting system should be optimised within the framework of the existing legal system. The reciprocity of the policy system should be strengthened, social norms should be improved, and orderly participation should be guided, so as to promote the standardised construction of mutual care for the elderly. The operation of the time bank mutual care model is mainly outlined as three parts: organisation, implementation and supervision. These three perspectives should be taken into account to clarify the division of responsibilities and improve the matching management and implementation rules. In terms of organisation, it is necessary to clarify the rights and obligations of service subjects and service recipients, improve the incentive mechanism and feedback mechanism, and protect the rights and interests of all subjects in terms of system construction, information sharing, mutual benefit and synergistic development of multiple subjects, and the reciprocity of the service model needs to be safeguarded by using the constraints of the supporting system. In terms of implementation, there is a need to harmonise the standards for the construction of time banks, the quality of service, and the relevant systems for depositing, transferring and managing the succession of "time coins". In addition, on the premise of adhering to the fundamental rules and regulations, local governments can formulate relevant implementation rules based on regional characteristics. Particular attention should be paid to combining the characteristics of the needs of local elderly groups, the current situation of old-age care and the existing informal system in the local area, so as to form a scientific mutual care model for the elderly construction programme tailored to the local situation, thereby improving the suitability of the system design and enhancing the acceptance and participation rate of local residents. In terms of supervision, it is necessary to strengthen the supervision of the construction of laws, the use of funds, the process of operation, and quality management, and to give full play to the supervisory and enforcement roles of the judiciary and social forces, so as to ensure that the management is standardised and the services are effective. For example, in terms of quality management supervision, labour value reserves should be reasonably quantified, grades between different services and exchange standards should be delineated, and a sound quality evaluation mechanism should be put in place to safeguard the sustainability of the time bank mutual care model for the elderly.

4.3. Building Long-term Trust Mechanisms in Society

Social trust is an intrinsic motivation for the development of the time-banking mutual care model of old age. It is necessary to build a long-term trust mechanism and to strengthen the foundation of the masses on the basis of improving the trust system. With regard to the modern trust system, involving social justice, transparent and effective transaction security, effective power supervision and other systems^[6], specific efforts can be made in the following two aspects. On the one hand, strengthen the construction of "universal trust and special trust". The government should give full play to its leading role in regulating its own behaviour and at the same time formulate legal, reasonable and effective mutual pension schemes and ethical norms in accordance with local conditions, with the goal of establishing a service-oriented and trusting government, improving the credibility of the government, and further guaranteeing the effective operation of the time bank. It is important to create a platform for continuous interaction to enhance the links between older groups, between service providers and service recipients, and to increase inter-group trust. On the other hand, with the help of technological empowerment, a time bank based on big data, blockchain, Internet of Things, cloud computing and other technological means has been constructed. For example, with the help of big data and blockchain technology to eliminate the impact of information asymmetry, to achieve unified management and openness and transparency of time bank data, and to use IoT technology to quickly collect the service needs of the elderly. Cutting-edge technologies can be integrated to improve the communication mechanism, transaction mechanism, feedback mechanism, supervision mechanism and the matching of service supply and demand in a number of aspects, in order to build a fairer competition and distribution mechanism, enhance the credibility of the time-banking mutual-help model of old age care, and then enhance the trust between the government, social organisations, enterprises and other main bodies, so as to form a long-lasting trust mechanism. With the establishment of a trust mechanism among the subjects and the gradual formation of a modern trust system, it is possible to promote synergistic co-operation among all parties, lay a firm foundation for mass participation, and form a sustained impetus for the development of the time bank mutual care model for the elderly.

5. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of China's markedly accelerating rate of population ageing, mutual care can effectively alleviate the current dilemma of insufficient social resources for the elderly by mobilising social resources. From the perspective of social capital theory, combined with the current situation of China's old-age care, as a typical mutual care model, time bank can empower the development of mutual care for the elderly. However, in the process of practice, there are certain problems. Social capital, as a special resource, is embedded in the time bank mutual care model for the elderly, which will help the future development of mutual care. Making good use of social resources can alleviate to a certain extent the plight of the mutual care. It is important to clarify the focus of future development in terms of participation networks, reciprocity norms and social trust, so as to ensure the sustainable operation of the time bank mutual care system, which in turn will continue to energise the production and reproduction of mutual old-age benefits.

Acknowledgements

This paper is the research result of the project funded by Provincial College Students' Innovative Entrepreneurial Training Plan Program of Nanchang Institute of Technology (S202211319032), and this paper is the research result of the project of the 14th "Challenge Cup" College Student Business Plan Competition of Nanchang Institute of Technology.

References

- [1] Zhai Z W, *Population opportunities and challenges for high-quality development in the new era - Interpretation of the Communiqué of the Seventh National Population Census of China* [N]. *Economic Daily*, 2021.5.
- [2] Li H H, Li W J, Li R. *Research on China's future retirement model--Expansion path based on time banking*[J]. *Journal of Management World*, 2020, 36(03):76-90.
- [3] Zhou J T, Qiu Y L. *International experience in the development of "time bank" and its inspiration for China*[J]. *International Finance*, 2022(10):60-71.
- [4] Robert D. Putnam. *Making Democracy Work*[M]. Princeton University Press, 1994.
- [5] Liu W P. *Collaborative Social Governance: Realistic Dilemmas and Path Choices - Based on the Perspective of Social Capital Theory*[J]. *Journal of Xiangtan University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 2013,37(04):20-24.
- [6] Yang K, Li F. *The realistic path of rural mutual pension development under the perspective of social capital*[J]. *Changbai Journal*, 2022(03):130-139.
- [7] Gao X Y, Zhou J S. *Operation Mechanism and Optimisation Strategies of Time Bank Mutual Care Model Based on the Perspective of Social Exchange Theory*[J]. *Journal of Hebei Agricultural University(Social Sciences)*, 2023,25(01):30-39.
- [8] Wu F. *From One-way Volunteering to Network Reciprocity: A Realistic Choice for the Sustainable Development of "Time Bank"*[J]. *Journal of Socialist Theory Guide*, 2021(12): 89-94.