

A Study of Community-based Elderly Care Services for Older People from a Social Support Perspective

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Abstract: *With the accelerated aging of the Chinese population, the active development of aging has become an important issue of concern for the government. Entering old age, both psychologically and physiologically, will undergo significant transformations. Using social support theory to study community elderly services, it is found that communities can enhance the substitution of formal social support systems for informal social support systems in providing elderly services, communities can increase the initiative of older adults to seek social support, and communities can collaborate multiple forces of social support. It also proposes countermeasures to enrich social support and network members, integrate social support network resources, provide multi-level social support, and improve the professionalism of community work so that the role of community social support can be better played.*

Keywords: *Elderly Care Services, Community, Social Support*

1. Introduction

In 2022, the population aged 60 and above in China will be 267.36 million, accounting for 18.9% of the national population, of which the population aged 65 and above will exceed 200 million, accounting for 14.2% of the national population. China's aging is still developing rapidly and is expected to reach the size of 450 million older people in 2050 ^[1]. The aging problem has become an issue and challenge that society needs to face together. Older people are facing problems of physical decline, mental illness, economic loss, and social exclusion, which have significantly reduced their quality of life of older people ^[2]. The 14th Five-Year Plan proposes to raise the active response to population aging as a national strategy. It offers to "promote the coordinated development of the elderly care business and the elderly care industry, improve the basic elderly care service system, develop inclusive elderly care services and mutual aid elderly care, build an elderly care service system that coordinates with home and community institutions and combines medical care and recreation, and improve the comprehensive supervision system of elderly care services. Comprehensive supervision system." Based on the social support theory, this paper studies the characteristics of social support provided by the community to help the elderly service. It proposes a series of countermeasures to give some reference for the district to provide elderly service better.

Social support, first introduced in the psychiatric literature in the 1960s, refers to the general term for the emotional or practical help one feels in social life. It helps individuals regulate and adapt, generate optimistic attitudes, and alleviate psychological problems such as anxiety and depression. Social support comprises three essential elements: subject, object, and content. The issue refers to various social forms such as government, business, individuals, or other organizations; the thing of support is vulnerable groups in distress, such as people with disabilities and older adults ^[3]. The content is further divided into actual social support comprehension social support, the former refers to objective visible support based on direct assistance such as social resources and material, and the latter refers to subjective backing, which is closely related to the emotional feelings of individuals, and this support can make the supported fully experience the feelings of being respected, supported, understood, etc., to obtain emotional satisfaction and pleasure ^[4]. Studies have concluded that good social support is beneficial for solving problems and crises in daily life, for physical and mental health and personal well-being, and alleviating life stress; it helps buffer personal and social conflicts, maintains social stability, and enhances social integration. The lack of social support is likely to lead to physical and mental illnesses in individuals and make the maintenance of daily life difficult, and the more social

support older people receive, the higher their well-being and quality of life ^[5].

2. The characteristics of community social support to help the elderly service

2.1 Community social support as an alternative elderly care service

In China, the "family" culture has a tradition of thousands of years, and the importance of family, home, and family is self-evident. The role of the social support system is also crucial. However, with the rapid development of the times, population mobility has intensified the weakening of social support for older adults, and the proportion of empty nesters in China is now more than half, and in some large cities and rural areas, the ratio of empty nesters is even more than 70% ^[6]. Older people living alone and empty nesters have lost their most core social support, family. In contrast, older people who migrate with their children leave their initially familiar social networks for unfamiliar cities, and relocation makes older people lose more social support. Research suggests that friendship is less important as social support in adulthood than work and marriage, yet it can serve as an alternative form of social support in old age for the widowed and retired ^[7]. Social support from family and friends is often warm, delicate, and full of emotional comfort, and this emotional support is an essential basis for maintaining positive emotions and well-being in life ^[8]. In contrast, formal support systems such as social security departments and civil affairs departments at all levels provide social support that is biased toward practicality and cannot take into account the emotional experience of older adults. Formal support systems that rely on institutional backing cannot fully replace the informal support system of family, and receiving relief from the government may also make some elderly recipients feel that they cannot create value and increase their sense of loss and uselessness ^[9].

And the community can be an effective alternative to the informal support system for two reasons. Social workers are backed by the government and powerful government assistants, facing the masses and bridging the communication between the masses and the state. Such an identity has excellent advantages for the social support provided by the disadvantaged groups to gain the trust and support of older people quickly, and trust is the basis for the existence and maintenance of the social support network. And community, as the central space of social life for older people who have withdrawn from the employment field, will create familiarity and identity with the place where they have lived for a long time and possess a collective consciousness. Second, the same social support can impact different older adults differently. The individual personalities of older adults, their perceptions of stressful events, and their psychological preconceptions of facing and solving stressful events affect the effectiveness of social support. Incredibly emotional, social support requires relevance and diversity, and community workers are closer to the lives of older adults, understand their personalities, pay attention to their different emotional needs, and can provide social support for older adults in a familiar environment that suits their requirements.

2.2 Community social support is proactive elderly care

Under the influence of cultural traditions of family ethics, older adults in China are more closed and have a simple social support network structure, and when faced with setbacks, older adults tend to rarely take the initiative to seek help and cope passively ^[10]. In addition, with age, physical function declines, physical and mental strength limit older adults from going out and socializing and getting assistance from others, and old age coincides with the high incidence of stressful events such as illness and widowhood, which increase the need for support from external resources ^[11]. Studies have shown a correlation between the degree of perceived social support and depression scores in older adults ^[12], and after a survey of older adults in Beijing, it was found that about one-fifth (19.05%) were mildly depressed, and nearly one-tenth (12.17%) had moderate to high levels of depression ^[13]. Most older adults do not have a clear concept of mental illness and pay enough attention to it, despise or conceal the condition, and do not receive effective guidance and professional treatment.

Modern lifestyles and life concepts have undergone radical changes in a short period. Still, older people's learning motivation and cognitive ability are gradually declining, and most have become the "old guard" abandoned by the times. In China, more than 150 million older adults still have been unable to catch the information technology expression in time. In a related survey, the scale of rural Internet users is 195 million people, but the proportion of rural elderly people who "often go online" is only 0.9% ^[14]. Many rural older adults have a low level of education, cannot type, and cannot afford smartphones, so the circle of interpersonal communication is more limited.

The community can provide "doorstep" services and door-to-door psychological counseling services or sympathy, can primarily alleviate the problem of older people being unable to go out to seek social support, and can also provide specialized and personalized services according to the different characteristics of older people, helping older people to better cope with the risks of aging. The community is a provider of social support for older people and a facilitator to establish and improve their social support network. The community helps more senior people to transmit social support: strengthen the social support network of the disadvantaged groups through volunteers and neighborhood mutual help; lay the foundation for getting support from others through supporting others; realize self-help to solve their difficulties by taking in social resources; and finally realize a benign social relationship network of self-help and mutual help.

2.3 Community social support as a collaborative elderly care

All social support subjects play a particular role in social support for older people but also have limitations. The social security policy provided by the state lacks a guarantee for the spiritual life of the elderly; the senior citizen university provides comprehension social support for the elderly, but the resources are limited and affected by distance and time; the enterprises can only provide comprehension social support for the retired workers of their units, and the coverage group is small.

As a place of resource integration, the community is one of the final landing points of social support, and the resources of various social supports eventually flow to the disadvantaged groups living in the community ^[15]. The community can collaborate with multiple parties to maximize the effect of different professional service resources provided by numerous entities without the constraints of time and distance, can reach all older people in the community, and can be point-to-point and face-to-face without limiting the conditions of older people themselves, so that older people of different ages, education levels, income levels, and health conditions can receive social support.

3. Countermeasures to improve community support to enhance the level of elderly services

3.1 Enriching social support network members and increasing participation in senior care services

The number and type of social support members directly affect the scope and quantity of mutual support. The channels of social support can be broadened by increasing external members and internal members. By creating a favorable social atmosphere, widely publicizing China's guidelines and policies on senior care, promoting the formation of a culture of respecting and honoring older people, and prompting a change in the concept of senior care, the whole society will care for, support and participate in the social support network for older people. The community can show older people's optimistic and aggressive life attitude, shape a positive social atmosphere and attract more older adults to participate by carrying out outdoor activities with publicity effects, such as exhibitions, school tours, and volunteer service.

The community should also make the "hardware hard," beautify the outdoor activity environment, and improve the facilities and equipment for senior sports activities. Some studies have shown that there is a significant positive correlation between physical exercise and social support for older people, and the higher the amount of physical exercise, the higher the level of social support obtained ^[16]. The Report on the Current Situation and Future Trends of Community Aging at Home in Hangzhou 2021 points out that the frequency of travel for older people is not low, with nearly 80% of the respondents moving around in or near the community once a day or more than once a day. Older adults have diversified needs for public service facilities, with physical exercise behavior accounting for the highest percentage, followed by leisure and recreational activities, and again by life necessity activities. Older adults have fewer self-improvement and social participation type activities, including going to senior activity rooms to read, participating in volunteer activities or charity activities, and attending senior education course training, as shown in Figure 1.

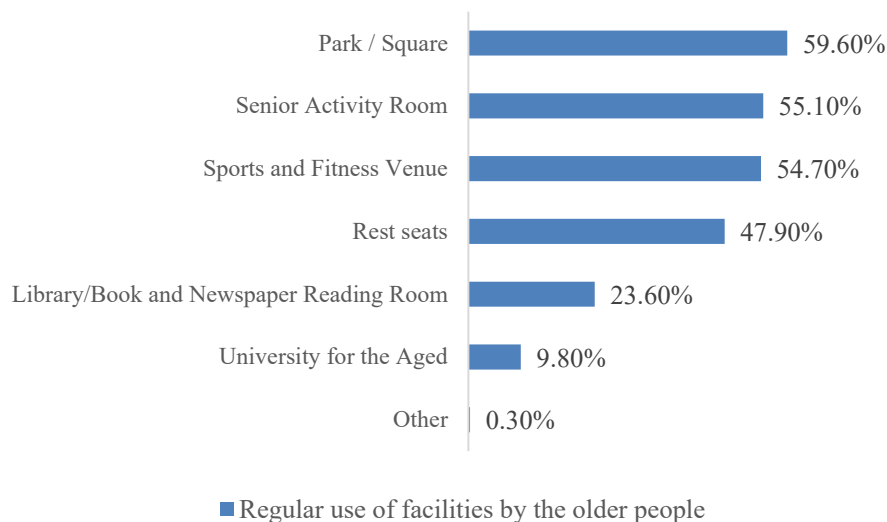
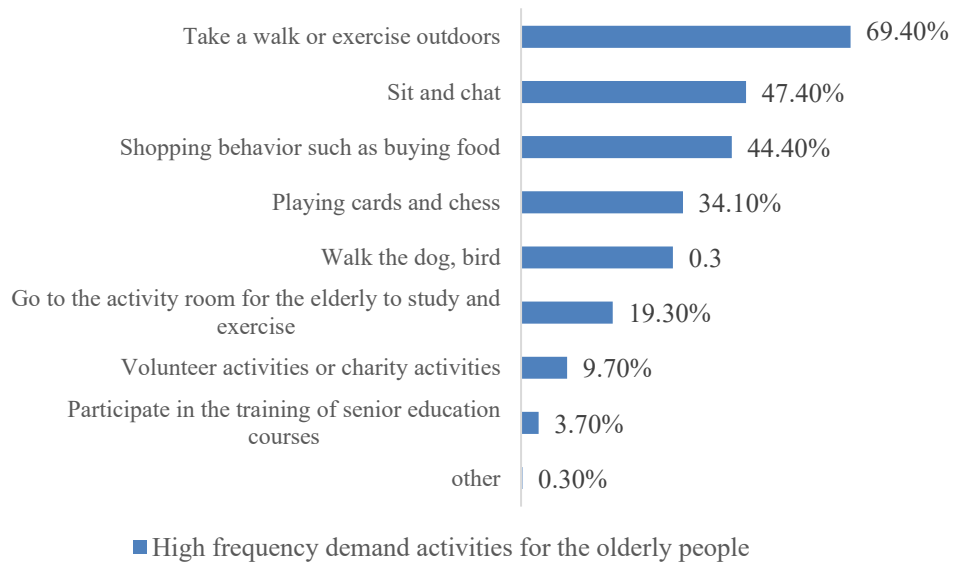


Figure 1: High-frequency demand activities and shared facilities for older people in Hangzhou ^[19]

This also indicates that older people pay more attention to physical exercise and leisure and recreational activities, which can enhance their health and physical fitness and enrich their spiritual life.

Enrich the variety of senior activities to attract more seniors to participate, increase opportunities for social interaction among seniors, and promote an atmosphere of relationship building and mutual care among residents. In addition to senior community centers, communities should encourage seniors to organize their activity clubs and regularly display the results of their activities and learning achievements, a way of showing themselves that can enhance their value beliefs. Regular learning can also stimulate the enthusiasm of older adults to learn, improve their mental outlook and motivate them to have confidence in life. Groups formed by hobbies and interests are easier to find resonance. Companionship expands social participation, enhances the ability of the majority of older people to integrate into society, into the times, and the group, and improves their social skills, developing friendship while regaining a sense of belonging to the group conveys the emotional message that older people are cared for, accepted and recognized.

Communities can alleviate the powerlessness, uselessness, helplessness, and hopelessness of retired workers after they leave their jobs by developing human resources for older people. For older adults who are in good health, energetic, and have a skill, communities can encourage them to join community work, such as managing senior activity centers, serving as teaching assistants in senior classes, and acting as senior volunteers. Strengthening the labor practice of labor education for older people and serving the community in the popularization of science, environmental protection,

community service, and security and stability can cultivate a sense of social responsibility among older people and improve their value.

In addition, the community should often reach out to the masses and visit residents to understand their characteristics and abilities, establish mutual support networks within the elderly groups, and assist the disadvantaged groups in finding social support that suits them and realizing the dual role of self-help and mutual assistance.

3.2 Collaborate with social support forces, and integrate elderly services resources

A social support network is a massive project that needs to rely on collective strength; government support and organization are essential, and professional community workers also need to make efforts. As the principal gathering place of social support resources, the community should take the initiative to discover, visit and understand various social supports, seek cooperation intentions, and attract multiple quality resources into the community by integrating corporate resources, public welfare organizations, and senior colleges. The community can use the sites and facilities within that jurisdiction to introduce senior classes, health lectures, training institutions, and cultural and sports equipment into the community to enrich the services of the old activity rooms. It can also broaden the scope and venues of senior activities, such as renting venues in neighboring schools, gymnasiums, art galleries, libraries, museums, and memorials, and integrating cultural, sports, and scientific resources.

Communities should take full advantage of the concentration of residents in the community and use the power of "group purchasing" to control the quality and price of tourism products, health products, and cultural products, which not only alleviates the financial and personnel problems in the operation of senior activity room programs but also enhances the purchasing power of residents. The community can also research residents' satisfaction with the services provided by the organization and help the organization improve its service quality, thus enhancing its visibility and public welfare influence and attracting more organizations to participate in community activities actively. The community and various social supports establish a relationship of mutual trust and mutual benefit. This helps build a solid bridge between older people in the district and the outside world, making accessing various social supports more accessible and manageable.

Communities can also rely on social forces, such as "intergenerational cohabitation" in Japan and the Netherlands, and the Tokyo non-profit organization Rib & Rib, which is dedicated to "intergenerational cohabitation. They introduce students to seniors to prevent them from becoming isolated. In the Netherlands, the "Humanitas retirement home" is a partnership with a nearby university where students walk and talk with older people, teach computer skills, teach drawing, play games, eat together, etc., and can stay in the home for free. The community can encourage college students to form youth volunteer groups to accompany older people to chat, dine with them, teach them how to use cell phones, etc. The community will record the service time and quality of service, which will provide a basis for their selection and recruitment in the future. The community can also take the lead in forming neighborhood support groups for older people, based on the principles of "voluntary, mutual benefit and proximity," to pay attention to, care for, and care for the empty nesters so that people of the same age are more likely to have common topics and friendship, solving the problem of lack of spiritual comfort for the empty nesters.

3.3 Emphasize emotional and social support and provide cultural aging services

With the changing concept of aging, the needs of older people for aging are not limited to material needs, but spiritual support is equally important, but most older people can only get enough practical help, including policy, material, and economic aspects, but emotional support they get is not enough to match the objective support^[19], and the community should provide multi-level social support. Education is the most effective means to disseminate scientific knowledge and adapt to life changes. Most older adults are unable to adjust to the rapid development of productivity in modern society, making the role of senior education even more critical^[20]. Although senior colleges are essential to realizing senior education, they need more resources and cannot meet the needs of older adults seeking education^[3]. Research data from the China Senior Education Industry Research Report shows that the elderly population prefers to study close to home, with nearly 50% of the elderly choosing community education, 16.7% choosing senior colleges, and only 8.3% preferring online education. Communities should develop "senior colleges at home" to not only release more resources for senior education but also attract more seniors to receive senior education and make it easier for those who are not physically

fit to travel to the classroom.

Table 1: Learning Styles and learning purposes of the elderly population ^[21]

Percentage of learning styles among the elderly population	University for the Aged 16.7%	Community Education 46.8%	Online Education 8.3%	Other Education 28.2%
Percentage of learning purposes of the elderly population	Increase knowledge 12%	Satisfying interests 22%	Interacting with people 29.7%	Passing the time 47.5%

The content of elderly education should not be limited to hobbies such as calligraphy and singing but should also focus on mental health, life education, and other value changes to improve the overall quality of older people ^[22]. Life education and life education can enhance the ability of older adults to adapt to social roles, social relationships, and lifestyle transition after retirement; they help older adults face up to a series of life issues such as life, old age, illness, and death ^[23]. Family harmony has a direct impact on enhancing family social support ^[9]; the content of senior education should also focus on topics such as intergenerational parenting and family education, which are constantly triggered in today's society, to guide older adults to establish correct parenting concepts, promote intergenerational communication between older adults and their families, and enhance family social support in the process of bringing into play community social support.

Through various social activities, such as regular visits to the empty nest elderly, social workers share part of the responsibility of the elderly and jointly resist the risks of old age; provide psychological counseling services to the widowed elderly, psychological counseling to the bereaved and widowed elderly, increase communication with the outside world, help them get over the pain of grief and face life with a positive attitude; pay attention to the special elderly groups such as the disabled and deaf, blind and deaf, and provide rehabilitation education Integrated services.

3.4 Improving the professionalism of community work and scientific provision of elderly services

The most important thing for the community to provide social support for older people is to understand the needs of more senior people to provide services suitable for them so that the efficacy of the social support network can be precisely exercised so that resources are not wasted. Formalism is not taken, and the effective docking and matching of resources between supply and demand are realized. To be able to understand the different characteristics and conditions of older people, community workers also need to accurately grasp the needs of older people in the district in the form of visits and questionnaires, focusing on particular groups, such as older people who have moved with them, older people who are elderly, older people who are empty nesters and older people in rural areas, to understand the basic situation and the main problems, and then make a professional assessment of the social support network for older people in four aspects: scale, foundation, quality, and intensity. The scale refers to the number of supporters; the foundation refers to the supporters' assistance; the grade refers to the network members' ability to use resources and the intensity of their willingness to provide resources; the power relates to the frequency of contact between network members and the scope and density of intensity self-help and mutual help. In this way, the effectiveness of service provision can be enhanced, and the response to people's needs can be strengthened. In the process of in-depth investigation, attention should be paid to the subject position of the people being served, respecting the ideas of the elderly and always maintaining equal interaction to gain the trust of older people and mobilize their enthusiasm to participate in social support. After providing comprehension social support, the quality of the service should also be followed up, and the emotional state and social interactions of older people should be used to determine whether they are comfortable with this type of social support realization.

Community workers should also receive regular, relevant training, use professional theories to guide social work practice and apply professional methods and techniques to enhance their service capacity further. Adhering to social work values and cultivating their credibility can promote communication and collaboration with other social support subjects ^[24].

4. Conclusion

We should vigorously develop the cause of older people and the aging industry and continuously meet the growing spiritual and cultural needs of older people so that older people can share the fruits of

economic development and social progress. The community is the last mile of grassroots social governance. Community organizations initiate, advocate and coordinate, which can create a healthy and friendly atmosphere for older people and build a positive and mutually supportive elderly environment. While providing solid social support such as funds and materials, communities can better comprehend social support and, to a certain extent, replace family social support to give empty nesters the missing emotional support. Communities can extend different senior care services to their doorsteps, meet diversified senior care needs nearby, and help older people build a good social support network.

By integrating social support resources and participating in social forces, older people will experience more and more sense of access and happiness, which is of great significance to building an age-friendly society, promoting the "Healthy China" strategy, and strengthening the construction of socialist spiritual civilization.

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