

The Mutual-Support Model of Elderly Care for Aged Farmers in Shandong Province

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ABSTRACT

Since China entered the aging society, the aging process has been accelerating. Rural mutual-support model of elderly care is an important supplement to the traditional model called family elderly care in rural areas. Being rooted in the traditional network of neighborhood's mutual assistance in rural areas, the essence of mutual support of elderly care lies in economic mutual assistance. It manifests itself in mobilizing social forces such as neighborhood and volunteers, making full use of the idle time of various human resources, mainly the elderly, and helping and serving each other at low cost. All walks of life should take it as an important implementation strategy and integrate it into the strategy of actively responding to population ageing and rural revitalization. The strategy of mutual-support elderly care can be summarized as follows: based on mutual financial assistance, focusing on mutual service, taking community home-based pension as the main position, it is to innovate various mutual-support elderly care models. Efforts should be made to form stable and diversified sources of funds, foster mutual aid teams, increase mutual aid content, and explore the establishment of standardized service management evaluation system. Institutional endowment and community endowment are interconnected and interoperable. Finally, it is essential to establish a circle-based, integrated, networked and institutionalized rural mutual-support elderly care system.

Keywords: *Elderly care, Rural elderly, Mutual-support.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since China entered the aging society, the aging process has been accelerating. According to the statistics of the National Office for Ageing, by the end of 2017, 240 million people being at the age of 60 or over 60, accounting for 17.3% of the total population, are expected to increase to about 255 million people by 2020, including about 118 million people living alone and in empty nests (Chinese National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). The current speed and scale of population aging make it a fact that "being old before turning wealthy" will bring various challenges and pressures to the government and society. In addition, in the context of social transformation, the transformation of traditional agriculture and the acceleration of urbanization have made many young and middle-aged people in rural areas begin to flow into cities. The number of elderly left-behind in rural areas is increasing. With the shrinking of family size and the structural transformation, the traditional home-based elderly care has been weakening. The occupancy rate of

institutional elderly care is not high because of backward management, high cost and insufficient beds.

Since 2008, Handan, Hebei Province, established the first rural mutual aid and happiness hospital in China, a new elderly care model between family and society - "mutual assistance for the elderly" has come into being. Mutual support for the elderly in rural areas is a new form of support for the elderly in communities or villages, which integrates the elderly in communities or villages to realize self-help and mutual assistance.

In 2017, the elderly population aged 60 and over in Shandong province reached 213.73 million, accounting for 21.4% of the total population, 4 percentage points higher than the national average; the elderly population aged 65 and over reached 13.998 million, accounting for 14% of the total population, 2.6 percentage points higher than the national average. In terms of the old-age dependency ratio (the proportion of the elderly population and the working population), the old-age dependency ratio of Shandong province about people aged 65 years and over is 20.3%, which is 7 percentage points higher than that of the sixth census in 2010

(Shandong Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Compared with the national average, the situation of population aging in Shandong province is more severe, and the burden of social elderly care is heavy.

In 12 of the 17 districts and cities in Shandong province, the proportion of the elderly population has exceeded 20%, and has entered a moderately aging society. The most serious degree of aging is Weihai City, with the proportion of the elderly population reaching 27.8%, followed by Yantai City, 27%, and Rizhao City, 23.3%. Liaocheng has the lowest degree of aging, with 18.4% of the elderly population (Shandong Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

In terms of the structure of the elderly population, there are 12.938 million people aged 60-69 in Shandong province, accounting for 60.5% of the total elderly population; 5.954 million people aged 70-79, accounting for 27.8% of the total elderly population; and 2.481 million people aged 80 and over, accounting for 11.7% of the total elderly population (Shandong Bureau of Statistics, 2016). In Shandong province, the aging degree of the rural population is higher than that of the urban population. Therefore, it is of great significance to explore the mutual support model of elderly care for the rural elderly to solve the serious elderly-care problem.

2. THE CONCEPT OF MUTUAL SUPPORT FOR ELDERLY CARE IN CHINA'S RURAL AREAS

According to the previous analysis, although rural mutual assistance in China has experienced ups and downs in the historical process, it is still sustainable after self-transformation and renewal because it is based on the realistic environment and secular traditions, and has the characteristics suitable for rural areas. The mutual support model of elderly care, also called mutual assistance, mutual aiding, mutual help, mainly means helping each other among aged groups or elderly-to-be groups, different from traditional family care for the elderly and institutional care for the elderly (Liu, 2019). Summarizing its core characteristics mainly includes the following points: first, under the conditions of self-sufficient and small-scale peasant economy in Chinese rural society for thousands of years, the mutual aid network and mechanism that people have built to avoid crisis has formed a kind of folk mutual assistance security system; second, this mutual assistance security

system is composed of various forms of mutual assistance, the essence of which is economic mutual assistance. It is instrumental rationality that helps each other, both in the long run and in the short run, because they can get expected returns. Thirdly, these forms of mutual assistance are informal mutual assistance under the guidance and norms of human ethics in the society with different order patterns. Clans, neighborhoods and production teams, villagers' committees and villagers' groups are the organizational units and important boundaries of these informal mutual assistance networks (Zhang & Bi, 2018).

Although the status and role of the rural mutual assistance security system has declined after the entry of a more efficient market economy and a more stable state security system into the countryside, under the condition that the rural economic and social conditions are still relatively backward, the folk mutual assistance has shown new vitality and positive performance through self-transformation and renewal. Mutual-aid social elderly care is both effective and virtuous (Gupta Rehman, 2017). It is not only a way of realizing social elderly care, but also a renewal and transformation of rural folk mutual assistance in China.

Considering the two dimensions and many factors of mutual aid and social endowment, we believe that mutual-aid social endowment is no longer just a simple construction of hardware facilities or mutual assistance between the elderly, but a sustainable effective and re-allocation of rural informal social resources, making full use of the idle time and resources of various rural human resources, especially the elderly, to develop a variety of types of social elderly care models of mutual fund, service and culture (Ransing & Rajput, 2015). It is also a social support system involving many fields, levels and aspects. Only when this system works effectively, can the sustainable development of mutual-aid society for the aged become possible. Accordingly, the concept of the rural mutual-aid social endowment is as: putting mutual-aid in the social endowment, under the leadership and support of the government, giving full play to the multi-principal role of villagers' autonomous organizations, social organizations, markets, etc., and mobilizing all kinds of rural human resources, mainly quasi-elderly people, in an orderly manner, as the main force (Bemelmans, Gelderblom, Jonker & De Witte, 2012)..

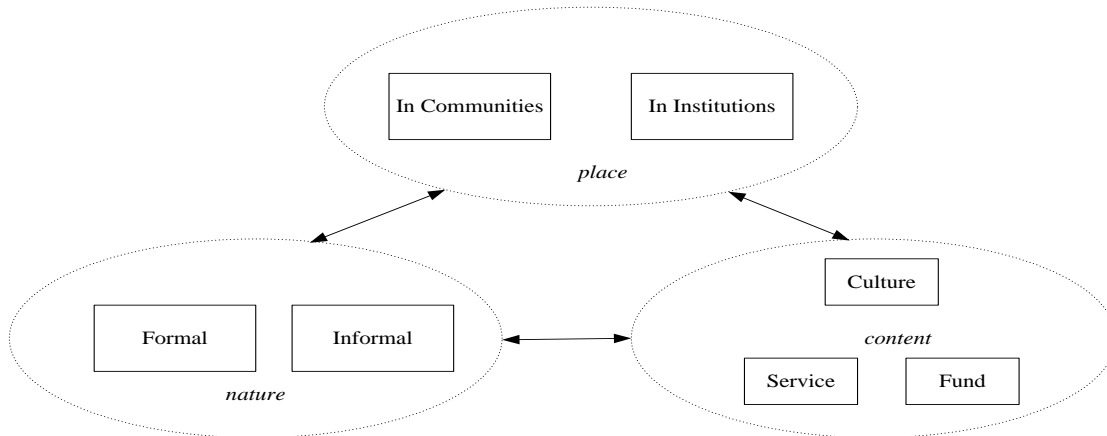


Figure 1 The Types of Rural Mutual Support for the Elderly.

Correspondingly, the classification of mutual-aid social endowment also expands into three aspects (as shown in Figure 1). According to the content of mutual assistance, it can be divided into three parts: mutual fund assistance, mutual service assistance and mutual cultural assistance. According to the nature of mutual assistance network, it can be divided into informal mutual assistance and formal mutual assistance. According to the place of mutual assistance, it can be divided into community home mutual assistance and institutional mutual assistance. What needs to be clarified is the culture rooted in the tradition of mutual assistance in rural areas. First, in the case of relatively scarce rural economic conditions, we can not talk about mutual assistance for the aged without economic mutual assistance, nor can we talk about mutual assistance among villagers without paid or valuable returns. Second, the social circle of traditional mutual assistance in rural areas contains human feelings, gratitude and so on, so that people can obtain important spiritual comfort. Thirdly, compared with the traditional informal mutual assistance, mutual-aid society provides better service and more labor. Informal mutual assistance network needs to be reorganized under the influencing factors such as the decline of informal mutual assistance, so as to play an irreplaceable role in the new situation.

3. ANALYSIS OF BUILDING RURAL MUTUAL-SUPPORT SOCIETY FOR THE AGED

According to the rethinking of the concept and the strategy of the rural mutual-aid society in China, this part will sort out and summarize the typical case materials obtained in the process of field research, and further explore the specific path of the development of the rural mutual-aid society in Shandong province.

3.1. The Formation of Stable and Pluralistic Sources of Mutual Financial Assistance is the Basis of Mutual Service and Cultural Assistance

Rural mutual assistance for elderly care, which is relatively successful in operation, has obtained operation funds through at least one way. According to the author's investigation, at present, the operation funds of mutual-aid social endowment mainly come from the following aspects: the payment of elderly people, public expenditure such as government/village committees, public welfare funds financed by social organizations and caring people, and operating income obtained through market operation.

In the aspect of community home-based elderly care, except for some small-scale villages with certain economic strength and strong cohesion, which rely on public expenditure such as the government/village committees to maintain their operation, most of the other operating funds come from multiple channels. In the aspect of institutional endowment, except for the township homes for the aged, which are mainly funded by the government, other types, including village-run homes, social-run homes for the aged and enterprises (individuals)-run homes for the aged, are fundamentally from multiple channels.

However, it is still difficult to expand the service content and scope of Mutual Assistance for the Elderly in most rural areas of China. The fundamental reason is that there is still no relatively stable and sustainable source of operating funds, the amount of disposable funds is small, and the lack of reserves. Therefore, we need to explore the establishment of a stable financing mechanism. First, on the basis of policy support and financial support from governments at all levels; we should vigorously develop rural economy, increase collective income and public funds, and then improve the well-being of rural elderly through redistribution. The second is to explore the way of business model of

mutual-support of elderly care, coordinate the development of the aging industry and the cause of the aged, develop the industry and make up for the cause. Rural areas can make full use of the organizational, cost and environmental advantages of local society, reduce the cost of information asymmetry, labor employment and other aspects of the market, and take a low-cost, low-consumption, low-price mutually-assisted aging industry road of cooperation with rural autonomous organizations. Thirdly, to explore the integration of rural Internet of Things, Internet, human resources network, pension network and other networks. Agricultural cooperatives, consumer cooperatives, pension cooperatives and other cooperatives should be integrated in order to make profit and guarantee, and realize mutual assistance of various economies. Fourth, it suggests asking rural collective funds and family funds of the elderly circulate effectively through mutual financial assistance. Mutual-aid elderly care cooperatives can be set up on a pilot basis in mature agricultural cooperatives. Mutual-aid care insurance funds can be established in the form of combination of compulsory and voluntary (Webster & Celik, 2014). All members of cooperatives should join in the insurance fund. They should pay a certain premium every year in the unit of their families. Those who are assessed to be unable to take care of themselves can obtain mutual-aid care services from the insurance fund. On this basis, we will gradually expand the scope of mutual care insurance. Fifth, we can adopt the method of delayed withdrawal, such as time bank.

3.2. To Establish a Sustainable Development System of Mutual-aid Society for the Aged

With the organization and mobilization as the starting point, we should cultivate mutual aid teams and explore the establishment of service training, implementation, accounting and evaluation system with different levels and classifications. Informal (watch-and-help) circles of relatives, friends and neighbours based on consanguinity, kinship and geography exist widely in rural areas of China. However, in order to establish a sustainable development system of mutual-aid society for the aged, these scattered mutual-aid resources and behaviors must be organized. Depending on the mobilization ability of local organizations (including village committees, senior citizens' associations, villagers' groups, etc.) and the professional skills of social work organizations, clear organizational objectives, forms and norms should be worked out, and a clear division of labor and mutual assistance team and mechanism should be established.

The organizers of community home-based elderly care include the village committee, the elderly association under the leadership of the village committee, social work organizations or other non-profit

organizations, villagers' groups, individuals and so on. Among them, the community home-based elderly care service centers/happy courtyards operated by the village committees or their senior citizens' associations and villagers' groups are the main carriers of home-based pension in rural areas, especially in developed areas. This is related to the administrative leadership status of the village committees and cooperative governance organizations in rural areas. From the comparison of several organizational forms, the village "two committees" dominate the development of elderly dining tables, a small number of mutual aid teams have been established, providing regular household cleaning services for the disabled and semi-disabled elderly. However, this is greatly affected by the importance attached by the two committees of villages to the elderly care. Many of them have limited energy and insufficient attention to the elderly care. The elderly association has strong organizational ability for the elderly, and the villagers' group can be refined to a group of villagers with stronger solidarity, closer emotions and smaller population. They are also the best choice for organizing mutual assistance for the elderly. If the service content is expanded and refined to achieve sustainable and efficient operation, the author believes that the involvement of professional social work organizations is extremely important. They have professional methods of community building, organizational mobilization, mutual assistance and other aspects. Profit-making purposes, age and other factors also make them more motivated to expand their scale and increase their content. Of course, if professional organizations want to enter the countryside smoothly, they can not fight alone. They must interact well with village autonomous organizations and internal social organizations, and integrate into and make use of the existing village-level governance model.

From the perspective of institutional endowment, enterprises/social and organizations/governments are the main organizers of institutional endowment, and well-functioning pension institutions have basically established autonomous organizations for the elderly to discuss and decide on hospital affairs through consultation. The second is responsible for daily supervision and inspection, reporting the situation to staff or volunteers in a timely manner. Third, it is responsible for mediation or advice, urging the correction of bad habits such as tobacco and alcohol. Fourth, to organize self-service, including cleaning, cleaning tableware and so on. In the future, the organizational path of rural mutual-support elderly care should be that governments at all levels and village committees should be responsible for management, guidance and supervision, formulate relevant policies and support measures, carry out extensive publicity and write into village rules and regulations, raise mutual assistance to the important position of revitalizing

traditional rural culture and rebuilding rural social governance, and then develop into rural laws and regulations. At the same time, we should foster community/institution mutual-support organizations for the aged, give full play to rural autonomous organizations such as geriatric associations and villagers' groups, and make full use of the joint efforts of geriatric autonomous organizations within the institutions, professional social work organizations and non-profit organizations, and make full use of the existing personnel organizational structure of geriatric associations or village/institution management to make full use of the idle time of various human resources in the communities/institutions, using it to cultivate all kinds of mutual aid teams which combine part-time/volunteer work and low-paid/free work. Social work organizations and non-profit organizations use professional knowledge to activate the self-organizing and self-serving abilities of senior citizens' associations, village committees and villagers' groups. Through the discussion of villagers' meetings or senior citizens' associations and the meetings of senior citizens' self-governing organizations, social work organizations and non-profit organizations decide on the training, implementation, accounting and evaluation system of graded and classified services suited to the situation of their villages/institutions, and at the same time, they can use various channels. It suggests recruiting and attracting volunteer teams to participate in the service, and on this basis, conditional rural areas can also try to integrate with the community comprehensive governance activities such as the Communist Youth League, the party building and the women federation.

3.3. To Focus on Mutual Service and Gradually Increase the Content and Scope of Mutual Assistance

The purpose of mutual-aid social elderly care is to meet the needs of relief and emergency financial support, life care and spiritual comfort of the elderly in rural areas through mutual assistance, mainly food, housing, spiritual comfort and life care needs of the elderly with moderate and severe disabilities. In the aspect of home-based elderly care in the community, mutual assistance in meeting the elderly people's food and spiritual comfort is relatively good. In the rural areas of underdeveloped areas, the content of cultural mutual assistance is very rich, including literary and art teams, singing groups, sports teams, painting and calligraphy clubs, etc. These activities complement the traditional informal forms of cultural mutual assistance such as chatting, visiting doors, playing cards, effectively alleviate the spiritual loneliness of the rural elderly, and also play an active role in rural culture. Generally, the governments at all levels and the countryside jointly invest in subsidies. They operate by themselves or cooperate with catering enterprises

(central canteen) in villager groups, administrative villages or towns. The elderly do not pay or pay 3-7 yuan in accordance with age and economic conditions.

In summary, due to the limitation of funds and organizational capacity, the content of home-based mutual elderly care services in rural communities is still relatively limited, and the coverage of services is relatively small. The well-run pension institutions save costs, improve cohesion and increase vitality through multi-faceted and multi-dimensional mutual assistance. Therefore, in the future, on the premise of continuous abundant funds, strong organizational strength and perfect mechanism, the orientation of rural mutual assistance for the aged should shift from spiritual and cultural mutual assistance to service mutual assistance, while expanding the scope of mutual assistance, and the government should increase the transfer payment of mutual assistance services for the disabled and semi-disabled elderly in rural areas. All kinds of human resources can not only use idle time to help others, get spiritual satisfaction, but also get a certain reward.

3.4. To Take the Community Home-based Elderly Care as the Main Position to Realize the Interconnection between Institutional Elderly Care and Community Home-based Elderly Care

The combination of institutional elderly care and community home-based elderly care is an important way to realize low-cost and efficient elderly care services in the future. However, due to the factors such as the purchasing power of the rural elderly, the strength of government subsidies, and the demand for institutional profits, only a few developed areas of rural institutional pension services radiate community home-based pension.

In fact, the main task of community home-based pension is to enrich the spiritual and cultural life of the elderly, alleviate spiritual loneliness, and provide all kinds of life mutual assistance services for the elderly at home. The main task of institutional elderly care is to focus on the care of the disabled and semi-disabled elderly. There is a mutually supportive relationship between them. The advantages of institutional pension lie in platform, personnel and service. Institutional places for the aged can become one of the platforms to enrich the spiritual and cultural life of the elderly in surrounding villages. Personnel and services can also radiate to the elderly scattered in the villages, especially the disabled and semi-disabled elderly, so as to reduce the marginal cost. Healthy elderly people around can make full use of the platform of institutions to help each other in culture, volunteer service and so on.

Therefore, in the future, pension institutions should give full play to the initiative and innovation of

enterprises and markets. On the one hand, they should mobilize the elderly residents to exert their own advantages/specialties or abilities, share with the elderly villagers through various forms, integrate into the production and life of villagers and villagers, and meet the needs of self-realization. On the other hand, actively explore and cooperate with surrounding towns and villages, such as investigating and collecting disabled and semi-disabled elderly people without care, providing meals.

4. CONCLUSION

Shandong province is a large agricultural province. Rural areas are an important growth pole of China's economic development in the new era, but they are also facing the problems of backward economic development, imbalance, and more severe than urban population aging. How to effectively cope with the aging of rural population and develop social pension to supplement the deficiency of family pension needs to be rooted in the current situation of Shandong province, and we must not blindly learn from the experience of developed countries. Following the inherent law of mutual support and informal mutual security system in rural areas, as well as various kinds of rural mutual assistance endowment practices springing up, this study proposes that mutual support is an elderly care model adapted to China's actual national conditions, and should rise to a strategic level of low-cost and active response to the aging of the rural population, and be included in the strategy of rural revitalization.

Mutual support in modern Chinese society needs to be integrated with the concept of public welfare and charity, but it is not equal to the concept of public welfare or charity. The essence of rural mutual support is economic mutual assistance. It is rooted in the traditional network of mutual assistance between relatives and neighbors in the countryside, and embodies the mutual protection at the organizational level and the expectation of reciprocity at the individual level. The reason why we should develop social pension through mutual support is to mobilize social forces such as neighborhood, volunteer and make full use of the idle time and low-cost help and service of various human resources mainly for (quasi) elderly people. It is also essential to solve the problems of rapid changes in rural society, underdeveloped economy, low level of national security, the loneliness of the majority of the elderly and the lack of sufficient cash flow to purchase market-oriented elderly care services, and to generate spillover effects in the construction of rural mutual

support community. In conclusion, the gradual way of making full use of the traditional rural mutual-support network, residents' leisure power and organizational advantages, building a mutual-support social elderly care system in stages and sub-regions, gradually differentiating care and nursing, and improving the level of specialization, standardization and marketization of nursing services is in line with the situation of rural villages in Shandong province, feasible and contains great significance of good governance.

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