

A study on social work intervention in community care for the elderly: a case study of H Community in Qingdao

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Abstract: Amid China's accelerating aging population, urban communities are witnessing a surge in elderly residents. While younger generations embrace modern lifestyles and increasingly choose to live independently after marriage, this trend challenges traditional family-based eldercare models. This shift leaves many seniors without the companionship and care they need from their children. Consequently, there is an urgent demand for developing elderly care services to address critical issues including financial support, daily care, emotional well-being, and social integration. Using Qingdao's H Community as a case study, this paper employs community care theory and gerontological social work principles. Through literature review, field research, and interviews, we conduct an in-depth analysis of current elderly care conditions and practical needs within H Community. By applying professional social work methods—including individual counseling, group therapy, and community engagement—we aim to leverage local resources. Our approach not only seeks to improve living standards and service quality for seniors but also helps establish supportive social networks, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of life for community elders.

Key Words: Social work; community care; older persons

1. Introduction

With the advancement of industrialization and urbanization, primary care groups have gradually declined, while family caregiving functions have weakened. Chinese households are becoming increasingly smaller in size, leaving only children often facing economic pressures, physical and psychological burdens, and insufficient professional care capabilities, significantly impacting traditional family-based elderly care models.

Institutional care appears to effectively compensate for family shortcomings, yet it faces challenges such as failing to meet emotional needs, inconsistent service quality, and financial waste. Applying social work methodologies to community care practices can help identify and refine new theories and techniques, thereby enriching professional knowledge and enhancing service quality. The 2021 State Council's "14th Five-Year Plan for National Aging Development and Elderly Care Service System" emphasizes advancing national strategies to actively address population aging, promoting coordinated development between aging-related industries and services, and establishing a comprehensive, multi-level elderly care system that continuously adapts to seniors' diverse high-quality living demands. To professionalize China's social work, building on theories of gerontological social work and community care, we analyze the current status and issues of elderly community care in Qingdao H Community by synthesizing theoretical achievements and predecessors' research

experiences. This study aims to provide robust support for China's community development initiatives.

2. The Practice status of elderly community care in H Community in Qingdao

Taking H Community with serious aging problem in Qingdao as the research object, this study reflects the problems of community care for the elderly in this study by analyzing the current situation of H Community and the service needs of the elderly in H Community.

As a pivotal economic hub in Shandong Province, Qingdao has witnessed the emergence of population aging challenges alongside its rapid urban development. By the end of 2024, the city's resident population of 10.37 million includes 2.38 million elderly residents, representing a 22.95% aging rate that exceeds the national average by 1.85 percentage points. While facing intensifying aging trends, the city also grapples with advanced aging, disability prevalence, and empty-nest households. Elderly care demands now exhibit multi-tiered needs, diverse service formats, and personalized requirements. H Community, a historic urban neighborhood with rich cultural heritage, is currently confronting prominent challenges in addressing population aging.

The seventh national population census data reveals significant demographic shifts in Community H compared to the 2010 Sixth National Population Census. The community now has 1,506 residents aged 60 and above, representing 25.12% of its permanent

Population. This marks a 534-person increase (55.04%) since the previous census, demonstrating a substantial rise in elderly residents and clear signs of aging. Among these seniors, some retired after dedicating their youth to urban development, while others live alone or in empty nests. Notably, many continue contributing through volunteer services by joining the "Five Elders" volunteer team, leveraging their experience and influence to participate in community affairs.

3. Daily care service needs

For elderly individuals with advanced age or physical disabilities, daily necessities such as dressing, personal hygiene, and bathroom routines often require substantial assistance. Those with mobility issues frequently need walking aids like canes or wheelchairs, accompanied by caregivers. Health management demands regular monitoring of blood pressure and blood sugar levels for chronic patients, strict adherence to prescribed medications, and specialized rehabilitation guidance for post-surgery recovery. For seniors with complete or partial loss of self-care abilities, continuous medical interventions including nasogastric feeding and suctioning are essential. Additionally, emotional support is crucial: solitary seniors and those living alone are prone to loneliness and depression. When facing health challenges or sudden bereavement, they may develop anxiety or depressive symptoms that could negatively impact their mental and physical well-being. Timely psychological counseling and crisis intervention are therefore vital.

The needs of the elderly are multifaceted. They require not only "support in old age" but also "opportunities for lifelong learning and enjoyment." Article 11 of China's Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly stipulates: "The state and society shall take measures to organize cultural, sports, and recreational activities suitable for the elderly, thereby enriching their spiritual and cultural lives." However, with population aging, existing senior activity facilities, cultural programs, educational networks, and educational activities fail to meet the growing demands of the elderly for lifelong learning and cultural enrichment.

China's elderly population predominantly suffers from chronic diseases, including cardiovascular conditions, cancers, and respiratory disorders. Compared to younger age groups, seniors require more healthcare services and rehabilitation programs, creating a particularly pressing demand for medical care

nationwide. Data from the 2020 Seventh National Population Census reveals that China's average life expectancy reached 77.93 years, up by 3.13 years from 74.83 in 2010. However, as of the end of 2020, over 130 million people aged 60 or older were diagnosed with chronic illnesses. While these conditions don't pose immediate life-threatening risks, they keep seniors in a state of suboptimal health, significantly hindering the improvement of their quality of life in later years.

4. Social work intervenes in the practical process of community care for the elderly in Hainan Community, Qingdao

Enriching the spiritual and cultural lives of elderly individuals, enhancing their understanding of health and wellness knowledge, and fostering proactive participation in community activities can significantly expand their social support networks. After establishing initial trust with residents, we focus on two key approaches: First, by providing sustained and targeted community care services that encourage active engagement, we create opportunities for mutual interaction among seniors, helping them develop a sense of belonging akin to family. Second, we cultivate self-care and mutual assistance skills, empowering older adults to confidently navigate life's challenges within their communities.

Activity Plan

- (1) "Charming Dragon Boat Festival, Fragrant Zongzi" activity
- (2) "Know Your Age Health" lecture

Process Evaluation

During the implementation of two events—"Fragrant Dragon Boat Festival with Zongzi" and "Health Awareness Lecture for Senior Citizens"—the preparatory phase demonstrated strong performance in material preparation and staff mobilization. The Dragon Boat Festival event achieved early completion of venue setup, ingredient procurement, and guest chef invitations, ensuring smooth launch. The health lecture featured professional doctors and nutritionists who calibrated equipment and prepared promotional materials to guarantee expert knowledge delivery. In the execution phase, the Dragon Boat Festival engaged seniors through Zongzi-making workshops and fun competitions, while the health lecture stimulated participation via knowledge sharing sessions, group discussions, and quick-response challenges. However, certain

aspects still showed shortcomings, primarily including:

Volunteer Professionalism requires improvement. During event organization, community volunteers generally lack professional training for elderly services. For instance, during the group discussion session of the "Silver Age Health Awareness Lecture," some staff failed to guide discussions effectively, causing them to deviate from the theme. Thirdly, responsibilities among staff remain unclear. During event preparation and execution, certain roles exhibit ambiguous boundaries. Fourthly, emergency response capabilities are inadequate. Staff demonstrated insufficient preparedness when handling unexpected situations. Fifthly, promotional methods are monotonous with limited impact. Current campaigns heavily rely on traditional approaches like posting posters in community bulletin boards, resulting in narrow coverage. For seniors who rarely go out, don't check notices, or are unfamiliar with electronic devices, limited information channels directly affect participation rates. Additionally, promotional content fails to highlight key features and practical value for seniors, making it difficult to spark interest. Sixthly, activity design inadequately considers elderly physiological characteristics, leading to delays. Seniors typically have slower reactions and shorter attention spans. During the "Heartfelt Dragon Boat Festival" event, the zongzi-making segment slowed progress due to requiring precise hand movements and physical effort, while the Q&A session in health lectures also experienced delays as some participants couldn't respond promptly. These issues reveal gaps in social workers' event planning. In future events, we should simplify operational complexity for handicraft workshops and competition activities. For lectures and symposiums, the pacing needs to be flexibly adjusted according to seniors' attention patterns. For instance, knowledge delivery could be divided into multiple 15-20 minute segments, interspersed with 5-10 minute interactive games or breaks. This approach helps participants relax, maintains engagement, and ultimately enhances the overall adaptability and flow of the event.

5. Suggestions and reflections on social work intervention in community care for the elderly

Community care services in China are undergoing rapid development and continuous refinement. While theoretical and practical research has advanced significantly, substantial room for improvement remains. The elderly

sample selected in this study comprised merely 35 individuals from Community H, predominantly comprising seniors with mobility capabilities and active participation. This demographic selection inadequately addresses vulnerable groups such as the elderly with advanced age, disabilities, or social isolation, thereby limiting the generalizability of the service model and research findings. Additionally, community care processes reveal a notable pattern of passive assistance acceptance among seniors, coupled with weak motivation for proactive engagement in community affairs. Social workers should employ group activities and community advocacy strategies to help seniors recognize their strengths, encourage collaborative participation, and transition from "service recipients" to "community builders." This approach would establish a virtuous cycle of "self-reliance + mutual support," fostering sustainable community development.

6. Conclusion

With the accelerating aging population and diminishing family caregiving capabilities, coupled with evolving social structures, elderly residents in Qingdao City now exhibit increasingly diverse care needs. Beyond basic material security, seniors are pursuing higher-level aspirations in healthcare, emotional support, and social engagement, presenting new challenges to traditional elderly care models. This study selects Community H in Qingdao as a research case, employing literature review, field observation, and in-depth interviews to analyze community-based elderly care practices. The findings reveal their demands for daily assistance, rehabilitation services, and cultural activities, while identifying persistent issues including low senior participation awareness, mismatched service supply-demand balance, and insufficient professional social work resources.

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