

Guangdong Rural Mutual Support Elderly Care: Existing Problems, Countermeasures, and Suggestions

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[**Abstract**] This paper focuses on the problems and causes of the rural mutual support elderly care model in Guangdong Province, and proposes a series of solutions. Strategies such as strengthening promotion and introducing social capital are employed. Through multi-channel promotion, the public's awareness and acceptance of mutual support elderly care are enhanced; meanwhile, actively introducing social capital, innovating in financing models, optimizing resource allocation, and improving service quality attract more elderly people to participate. Additionally, it emphasizes establishing a sense of mutual support, sharing successful experiences, expanding the volunteer team, and constructing a mutual support network. Through this series of measures, it aims to promote the sustainable development of the rural mutual support elderly care model, providing rural elderly people with warmer, more comfortable, and higher-quality elderly care services, and achieving the social goal of "providing for the aged and entertaining the aged".

[**Key words**] rural mutual support elderly care; Guangdong Province; countermeasures and suggestions

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1 Introduction

China's current elderly care service system encompasses diversified models, mainly including social elderly care, institutional elderly care, and home-based elderly care. These elderly care methods have their own characteristics and can effectively respond to the actual needs of China's economic and social development, gaining universal recognition and support from all sectors of society. On this basis, mutual support elderly care, as a new elderly care model, is gradually emerging. Its core concept lies in narrowing the gap between the aging process and economic and social development, promoting harmonious coexistence between the two. Especially in Guangdong Province, the mutual support elderly care model in rural areas, as an important practice in this field, not only demonstrates positive effects, providing rural elderly people with support services and care that are closer to their lives, but also faces some challenges and problems that cannot be ignored. These problems involve fund-raising, service quality improvement, participation enthusiasm maintenance, and other aspects, requiring joint efforts from all sectors of society to explore a more perfect development path to ensure the sustainable and healthy development of the rural mutual support elderly care model, better serving the actual needs of the broad rural elderly population.

2 Current specific problems of rural mutual elderly care support in Guangdong Province

2.1 Insufficient fund investment

Insufficient fund investment is a core challenge currently faced by the rural mutual support elderly care model in Guangdong Province, posing serious challenges to the sustainable development of mutual support elderly care at multiple levels. Firstly, in terms of infrastructure construction, whether it is the new construction, renovation, or maintenance of elderly care service facilities, substantial fund support is required. However, due to insufficient

funds, infrastructure construction in many rural areas progresses slowly, making it difficult to meet the increasingly growing care needs of the elderly. This not only limits the improvement of the quality of life of the elderly, but also affects the overall effectiveness of the mutual support elderly care model. Secondly, cultivating elderly care habits and providing continuous help and reward mechanisms also require a stable capital flow. Mutual support elderly care emphasizes mutual help and love among community members, but the long-term maintenance and deepening of such mutual help behavior cannot be separated from material incentives and spiritual support. Fund shortages lead to many mutual support elderly care projects being difficult to sustain after launch, affecting the enthusiasm and stability of the elderly in participating in mutual support elderly care.

2.2 Lack of professional services

Firstly, China's elderly care service economy is still in its infancy, and a professionalized and standardized service system has not yet been fully established, making it difficult for the mutual support elderly care model to obtain sufficient professional support during implementation. This lack of professionalism greatly reduces the effectiveness of mutual support elderly care and may even cause physical and mental harms to the elderly due to improper operations.

Secondly, there are still many deficiencies in the integration of elderly care issues in China, and the coordination mechanism between various departments is not sufficient, leading to serious fragmentation of policies and services. This fragmented status makes the mutual support elderly care model face many difficulties in resource integration and service provision.

Furthermore, the lack of elderly care knowledge is also a major challenge faced by the mutual support elderly care model. Due to historical, cultural, educational, and other reasons, China's elderly population generally lack the elderly care knowledge, as well as the sufficient understanding and knowledge of how to conduct elderly care in a scientific and healthy way. At the same time, workers who provide services to the elderly, especially those who are non-professional volunteers or family members, often lack necessary elderly care knowledge and skills, making it difficult to provide high-quality services. This lack of knowledge not only affects the effectiveness of mutual support elderly care, but may also adversely affect the physical and mental health of the elderly. It is particularly noteworthy that the caregiver group in the mutual support elderly care model is highly diverse, with caregivers possibly coming from different social backgrounds and having different motives and expectations. However, most caregivers have not received systematic training or possess relevant professional knowledge before providing services, making them often feel overwhelmed when facing complex elderly care issues. Some caregivers may make inappropriate decisions or behaviors due to lack of necessary skills and knowledge, thereby causing unnecessary harm to the elderly.

2.3 Insufficient promotion and publicity

The awareness of the rural mutual support elderly care model in society is not high, and many rural residents lack understanding of the concept and model of mutual support elderly care, leading to low participation and enthusiasm. Local governments and social organizations often lack effective promotion strategies and means when promoting the mutual support elderly care model. They may simply release some policy documents or promotional materials without conducting on-the-ground promotions, explanations, and demonstrations in rural areas. This "skimming the surface" type of promotion is difficult to attract the attention and interest of rural residents and fails to let them truly understand the advantages and value of the mutual support elderly care model.

2.4 Constraints of traditional concepts

Some rural residents have certain limitations in their way of thinking and ability to accept new things. They

may be accustomed to traditional home-based elderly care and hold skeptical or repulsive attitude towards new elderly care models such as mutual support elderly care, believing it does not conform to their values and living habits.

3 Reasons for the problems of rural mutual support elderly care in Guangdong Province

3.1 Limitations of economic development level

Although Guangdong Province is relatively developed overall, compared to urban areas, the economic development level of rural areas is still relatively low. This leads to limited financial investment in rural areas, making it difficult to support the comprehensive development and high-quality operation of the mutual support elderly care model. Economic constraints directly affect the construction of elderly care service facilities, staffing of service personnel, and the richness of service content.

3.2 Insufficient policy support and institutional guarantees

Although the government has issued a series of policies to support rural elderly care services, the execution and enforcement of these policies may be inadequate in specific implementations. Additionally, specialized policies and institutional guarantees for rural mutual support elderly care are not yet sufficient, lacking specific operational guidelines and regulatory mechanisms, making the mutual support elderly care model lack strong institutional support during its development.

3.3 Low social awareness and participation

Residents in rural areas have relatively low awareness of the mutual support elderly care model, and many people lack understanding of this new elderly care method, even having misunderstandings. Meanwhile, due to the influence of traditional concepts in rural areas, some elderly people may prefer family care or institutional care, with low acceptance of mutual support elderly care. The lack of social awareness and participation limits the promotion and popularization of the mutual support elderly care model.

3.4 Talent loss and lack of professional skills

Due to economic, cultural, and other factors, rural areas often struggle to attract and retain skilled talents in elderly care service. This leads to difficulties in staffing for rural mutual support elderly care service institutions, with the professional skills and service levels of service personnel failing to meet the diverse needs of the elderly.

3.5 Lagging infrastructure construction

The infrastructure construction in rural areas is relatively lagging, with poor conditions for various facilities, including elderly care service facilities. This directly affects the implementation and effectiveness of mutual support elderly care services, making it inconvenient for the elderly to enjoy services. The lagging infrastructure construction limits the development space and service quality of the mutual support elderly care model.

3.6 Homogenization of service content and misalignment of supply and demand

Currently, rural mutual support elderly care services mainly focus on basic life care and safety watching, lacking diversified service content targeting the psychological, spiritual, and cultural aspects of the elderly. At the same time, due to insufficient understanding of the elderly care needs of rural elderly people, there is a certain degree of disconnection and mismatch between service supply and demand. In response to the above reasons, Guangdong Province needs to adopt a series of measures to strengthen the construction and development of the rural mutual support elderly care model. These include increasing financial investment, improving policy support and institutional guarantees, raising social awareness and participation, strengthening talent cultivation and recruitment, accelerating infrastructure construction, and enriching service content. Through the implementation of these

measures, we can gradually solve the current problems of rural mutual support elderly care, promoting the continuous improvement and development of the rural elderly care service system.

4 Suggestions for Guangdong rural mutual support elderly care

4.1 Increase policy support and funding to build a diversified elderly care service system

To fully respond to and efficiently meet the diversified needs of rural elderly people, we urgently need to establish a comprehensive, detailed, and flexible elderly care service mechanism. This mechanism will deeply integrate national policy guidance with local realities, with family-based elderly care as the cornerstone, while actively exploring and strengthening the complementary roles of mutual support elderly care and institutional elderly care to form a “trinity” elderly care structure. At the macro level, it is necessary to formulate long-term development plans, clarify the strategic positioning of elderly care services in social development, and ensure that resource investment matches demand growth.

In terms of specific implementation, rural areas with a better economic foundation and a positive social atmosphere can be prioritized as pilot projects. Through policy preference and capital injection, the mutual support elderly care model can be promoted and established. These pilot projects will focus on the actual needs of the elderly, starting with basic services such as regular visits, purchasing and delivery, and gradually expanding to comprehensive services such as health management, psychological comfort, cultural entertainment, forming a progressive service model from simple to complex and from shallow to deep. At the same time, encourage and guide the participation of social capital, broaden funding sources through models such as Public-Private-Partnership, and provide a solid economic foundation for elderly care services.

4.2 Cultivate and expand the professional talent pool to improve the quality of mutual support elderly care

Professional talent is the key to improving the quality of rural mutual support elderly care. Therefore, it is recommended to increase the training of personnel for elderly care, and comprehensively improve their professional quality and service skills by establishing special training funds, introducing professional training institutions, and conducting online and offline combined training. The training content will cover multiple aspects such as gerontology psychology, basic medical knowledge, emergency rescue skills, and communication skills, ensuring that service personnel can comprehensively and professionally meet the diversified needs of the elderly.

In addition, it is recommended to focus on improving the self-service capabilities of the elderly. By regularly holding elderly training classes, volunteer service experience sharing sessions, and other activities, stimulate the enthusiasm of the elderly to participate in mutual support elderly care and enhance their self-management and service capabilities. At the same time, actively invite retired medical staff, elderly care experts, and others to join our training system, utilizing their professional knowledge and rich experience to provide high-quality training and guidance to the elderly and volunteers.

Addressing the relative scarcity of medical resources in rural areas, it is recommended to strengthen cooperation with local medical institutions, and establish emergency rescue green channels to ensure timely and effective treatment for the elderly in emergency situations. At the same time, promote the deep integration of village clinics with mutual support elderly care services, providing regular health checks, chronic disease management, medication guidance, and other services for the elderly, comprehensively improving their health levels and quality of life. Through the implementation of these measures, build a high-quality and professional rural elderly care service team, and lay a solid foundation for the high-quality development of the mutual support elderly care model.

4.3 Strengthen promotion and advocacy strategies to deepen social awareness of mutual support elderly care

Firstly, strengthen multi-channel promotion to raise public awareness.

To fully promote the mutual support elderly care model, it is recommended to build a three-dimensional promotion network. Utilize traditional media such as the village broadcasting system to regularly broadcast promotional audio about mutual support elderly care to ensure that information reaches every corner. At the same time, keep up with the times and fully utilize new media tools such as WeChat and short video platforms to create engaging promotional content, such as micro-movies, animated explanations, and real-life case shares, to attract a broader audience, especially the attention of young people and migrant workers, and spread the concept of mutual support elderly care through their efforts. For the children of empty-nest elderly people, it is recommended to plan a series of promotional materials emphasizing the unique advantages of mutual support elderly care in compensating for the lack of companionship and improving the quality of life of the elderly, eliminating their concerns, and enhancing their trust and support for the mutual support elderly care model.

Secondly, establish a sense of mutual support and share successful experience.

To completely change the traditional concept of “raising children to support oneself in old age” among rural elderly people, it is recommended to actively carry out promotional and educational activities, invite representatives from neighboring villages and towns that have successfully implemented mutual support elderly care to share their experience, and let the elderly personally hear and see the positive changes brought about by mutual support elderly care through story-telling sessions, forums, and other forms. At the same time, plan “Mutual Support Elderly Care Experience Days” to encourage the elderly to personally visit mutual support elderly care institutions and eliminate concerns and enhance their willingness to participate through personal experience. In addition, by establishing a mutual support elderly care forum, WeChat public account columns, etc., provide a platform for the elderly to exchange experience and share feelings, further consolidating and deepening the social foundation of mutual support elderly care.

Thirdly, expand the volunteer team and build a mutual support network.

For outstanding volunteers, it is recommended to provide material rewards, issue honorary certificates, and widely promote them on social media to set examples and inspire more people to join. At the same time, encourage mutual assistance among friends, relatives, and neighbors, and enhance community cohesion by establishing a points redemption system and recognizing mutual assistance exemplars, fostering a good atmosphere of “I help others, and others help me”.

4.4 Introduce social capital to promote the sustainable development of mutual support elderly care

Firstly, innovate in financing models and optimize resource allocation.

Given the funding and resource bottlenecks faced by rural elderly care, it is recommended to actively introduce social capital and encourage social capital to participate in the construction and operation of mutual support elderly care service institutions through PPP model, equity investments, donations, and other methods. At the same time, it is recommended to strive for government subsidies and policy support to form a multi-governance structure involving the government, society, and individuals. In terms of fund utilization, focus on efficiency and transparency, ensuring that every penny is spent wisely and improving fund utilization efficiency.

Secondly, improve service quality to attract elderly residents.

To attract more elderly people to choose the mutual support elderly care model, it is recommended to create a

warm and comfortable living environment. By introducing professional personnel, conducting regular training, optimizing service processes, and other measures, ensure that the elderly can enjoy high-quality medical, nursing, and psychological comfort services. At the same time, based on the actual needs of the elderly, carry out colorful cultural and sports activities to enhance their sense of belonging and happiness.

Thirdly, promote the integration of public welfare and mutual support to build an elderly care service ecosystem.

In promoting the development of mutual support elderly care, it is recommended to focus on the organic integration of public welfare and mutual support, encouraging public welfare organizations, social groups, businesses, and other forces to jointly participate in the construction and management of mutual support elderly care service institutions. By establishing information sharing platforms, strengthening cooperation and exchanges, achieve resource complementarity and advantage sharing. At the same time, promote the cultivation and development of professional talents to provide continuous talents support for the mutual support elderly care industry. Through the implementation of this series of measures, a comprehensive, fully functional, and high-quality rural mutual support elderly care service ecosystem will be gradually established.

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