

Optimization Path of Old-Age Service in China under the Background of Aging

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Abstract. At present, the aging process of China's population continues to accelerate, which makes China's aging population show a growing trend. At the same time, the number of elderly people and empty nesters is also increasing. And the demand for aged care provision has changed from basic life care to diversification and quality. This paper focuses on the development dilemma and optimization of pension services in China under the trend of population aging, uses the method of literature analysis, examines the core characteristics of China's aging society and the development status of aged care provision, and analyzes the prominent problems existing in the current aged care provision. The study found that the obvious contradiction between supply and demand of aged care provision in China is particularly serious, which is embodied in the imbalance of supply structure, the low level of specialization of service quality, the imperfect service mechanism, and the lack of coordination. In view of the above problems, this paper puts forward the specific optimization path in the field of old-age services, provides a theoretical basis for the government to formulate relevant policies, and provides more exploration for the improvement of the current old-age service system, the improvement of service level, and better response to the aging population society.

Keywords: Old-age service, aging, optimization path.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the annual decline of China's fertility rate and the extension of the average life expectancy make the social development trend of population aging irreversible. China's demographic change poses significant challenges to long-term growth, fiscal sustainability, and social equity [1]. At the same time, as population aging deepens and family structures change, the demand for care among disabled and cognitively impaired elderly people has increased, and the issue of aging in rural populations has become increasingly serious [2]. The aging in China is characterized by an expanding elderly population, intensified advanced age and disability, an increasing number of empty-nest and solitary elderly, and significant urban-rural disparities. This urgently requires aged care provisions to develop in a multi-level, diversified, and high-quality manner. Basic daily living care is needed, but so are high-quality spiritual comfort and medical care services. The diversified needs of an aging society are often accompanied by insufficient services and low resource allocation efficiency, especially within the elderly care system framework [3]. Against this backdrop, this paper reviews the core characteristics of China's population aging and the current development status of aged care provisions, analyzes the prominent difficulties in current aged care provision, and attempts to explore a scientifically feasible path for development optimization, which holds important theoretical and practical significance.

From an international viewpoint, developed countries such as those in Europe, America, Japan, and South Korea entered an aging society relatively early. After decades of exploration and practice, they have developed distinctive aged care provision models and optimization paths, accumulating rich experience. For example, the United States focuses on building a market-oriented aged care provision system, encouraging social forces and market participants to engage in the provision of aged care provision, and has established diversified aged care provision models along with a comprehensive elderly care financial support system; Focusing on the aging and disability issues, Japan has implemented the "care insurance system", which has expanded the coverage of the aged care provision system and made the division of labor more clear. At the same time, it has paid more

attention to the joint role of home care and community service in elderly care; Germany emphasizes the collaborative efforts of the government and the public, improves the standards and quality supervision system of aged care provisions, and develops the aged care provision industry with more normalize and professional standards. The practical experiences of these developed countries provide valuable reference for optimizing aged care provisions in China. However, due to China's large population base, rapid aging process, uneven urban-rural development, and differences in cultural traditions and social systems, foreign experiences cannot be copied directly. It is necessary to explore optimization paths for aged care provisions that are characteristic of China and aligned with national conditions.

Based on this practical need, this paper conducts relevant research using the literature research method, combining the actual situation of the aging population in China. It studies Chinese and foreign literature and official statistical data. According to the prominent problems existing in the current development of aged care provisions, it proposes targeted optimization paths in aspects such as the service supply structure, the level of service specialization, and the aged care provision mechanism, providing a reference for the development of aged care provisions in China.

2. The Current Development Status and Demand Characteristics of Aged Care Provisions in China's Aging Society

2.1. The Core Features of Population Aging in China

First, it is large in scale and fast-growing. According to the data of the National Bureau of statistics, by the end of 2022, the population aged 60 or older in China had risen to 280.04 million, accounting for about 19.8% of the national population, of which the population aged 65 or older was about 209.78 million, accounting for about 14.9% of the national population. According to the classification standards set by the United Nations, China has entered a society with severe aging. At present, China's aging population is still rising, and the ratio of aging population is rising.

Second, the aging and disability rates are intensifying, with nearly 40 million elderly people who are disabled or partially disabled, resulting in a rigid increase in care demand. According to publicly available data from the Fifth National Population Census in 2000, the ratio of people aged 60 or older was 10.33% in 2000. Compared with 2000, the ratio of people aged 60 or older in China has increased by about 9.47%, indicating that the aging process in China is accelerating. In addition, the figure for the oldest-old is increasing, and the proportion of disabled elderly is also rising.

Third, compared with cities and towns, the aging degree in rural areas is more serious, the degree of aging in rural areas is higher than that in cities and towns, and the problem of empty nest left behind is obvious. In the past decade, the large-scale cross-regional movement of young and middle-aged populations has further widened the levels of aging across regions. Young people continue to cluster in economically developed areas with more job opportunities, statistically raising the resident population base in these areas, which lowers the proportion of elderly individuals locally. In contrast, underdeveloped areas with large labor outflows see a continuous decline in resident population, causing a passive increase in the proportion of elderly people. This results in more severe aging in rural areas compared to urban areas, with a noticeable difference in the degree of aging between urban and rural regions, which also leads to significantly different demands for aged care provisions in rural and urban areas.

Fourth, the family is becoming smaller, and its caregiving function continues to weaken. The weakening of family pension function in China has also become a problem. Against the backdrop of insufficient long-term care service supply and relatively low pension levels, families have always been the main caregivers for the elderly in the country. In the process of China's modernization, changes in family structure are embedded within social transformation, mainly manifested as simplification of family size and structure, and population aging. This has led to changes in traditional family types and living arrangements, thereby weakening the traditional caregiving function of families [4].

2.2. The Current Development Status of Aged Care Provisions in China

At present, China's aged care provision model has formed a basic pattern of home-based care as the foundation, community-based care as a support, and institutional care as a supplement, but the development of these three models is uneven.

According to the Seventh National Population Census, among the population aged 60 and above, 2.32% are elderly individuals who cannot live independently. 6.04% live alone (without a caretaker), and 8.35% live in elderly care institutions. To properly care for disabled elderly people living at home, it is necessary to leverage the combined efforts of family self-care and home-based aged care provisions. However, there is a mismatch between insufficient family and community service supply and an excess of institutional care capacity, leading to underutilization of resources and deviation from expected policy outcomes [5]. In terms of service provision, although basic life care services have gradually expanded with government attention and promotion, the supply of high-quality services such as medical care and psychological comfort remains inadequate. According to statistical bureau survey reports, the awareness rate of depression among elderly people in China is 49.0%, and the awareness rate of Alzheimer's disease is 60.3%. In terms of countryside and city regions, the awareness rate of depression among the aged in city regions was 60.9%, 26.0% higher than that in countryside regions, which shows that the development of countryside and city regions is uneven.

3. Prominent Issues in China's Aged care Provisions under the Background of Aging

3.1. Imbalance in Service Supply Structure, Low Supply-Demand Matching

The structure of aged care provision supply is imbalanced, reflected in the types of services. At present, most service types are still limited to medical services and light medical care. The majority of service items are in the form of organizing physical examinations, while extremely important spiritual services for the elderly are neglected. Compared with physical needs, the mental and psychological needs of the elderly receive relatively less attention, which makes it difficult to meet their multi-level service needs. In 2021, the proportion of 'empty-nest' elderly reached 59.7%, indicating a strong need for companionship and psychological and spiritual care among the elderly population. Looking at urban and rural areas separately, 12.4% of urban elderly live alone, while 16.3% of rural elderly live alone, showing that the phenomenon of 'empty-nest' is more severe in countryside than in city regions. According to data from the "China Blue Book of Aging," nearly 30% of rural empty-nest elderly experience psychological problems such as depression and anxiety. Currently, psychological care services for the rural elderly are relatively lacking. Due to the long-term absence of their children for work, rural left-behind elderly lack familial companionship and emotional communication, leading to loneliness in daily life and a noticeable increase in mental health risks. Urban areas have richer material and cultural resources compared to rural areas. Rural elderly have fewer recreational resources, and their external communication and social interactions are often limited to superficial exchanges within the village, lacking deep communication with the outside world, which further exacerbates the mental health risks of the rural elderly. However, the service resources and allocation available to the rural elderly are significantly lower than those for urban aged. Aged care provision resources in China are concentrated in urban areas, and the influence of nursing homes, care institutions, and social organizations on rural areas is comparatively weak. This indicates that the service provision structure for China's elderly population shows a clear imbalance between regions and between urban and rural areas.

3.2. The Quality of Aged Care Provisions Varies, and the Level of Professionalism is Relatively Low

By the end of 2025, there will be only 500,000 certified on-the-job elderly care workers nationwide. According to the national basic care configuration standard of 1:4, it is estimated that the current shortage of professional elderly care talents has reached as high as 9.5 million. On the other hand, the service levels and quality of elderly care personnel are uneven, lacking standardized systematic training. Their education levels are often relatively low, with little relevant education and training, and they have insufficient mastery of professional skills in related fields such as sociology, psychology, and nursing. This has become a major pain point in the building of the aged care service workforce. Regarding the evaluation system of aged care provision quality, various cities across China have explored and formed their own individual standards, but there is a lack of a unified standard that can reach consensus. How to build an objective, appropriate, and intelligent evaluation system for aged care provision quality is still under discussion.

In China, pension institutions are an indispensable part of the service for the disabled aged, but they are facing the challenge of lack of pension service talents. This talent issue severely restricts the progress of China's aged care institutions and the elderly care sector, becoming a bottleneck for their growth and expansion. The personnel turnover in China's elderly care industry is relatively high, and there are generally difficulties in recruiting and retaining nursing staff. This not only limits the improvement of service professionalism but is also unfavorable for the long-term stable development of the aged care provision system. This also indirectly leads to issues of non-standard or inadequate services in some aged care institutions and community centers.

3.3. The Aged Care Provision Mechanism is Not Well-Developed, and Insufficient Coordination

Currently, China's pension system still has some problems and faces considerable challenges [6]. Under the existing governance system, aging related policies and management functions belong to multiple departments, lacking top-level coordination and goal coordination. The horizontal division of responsibilities among departments is fragmented and disconnected, coordination is insufficient, creating policy gaps and low efficiency in collaboration. This results in weak public pension security, inadequate safety net capacity, insufficient momentum for the development of the pension industry, and limited market vitality. In addition, the responsibilities of the government, society, family, and market are unclear, coordination and cooperation are insufficient, leading to a situation where each operates independently. The major actors of aged care provisions lack unified allocation and division of labor, and insufficient coordination and incomplete cooperation make it difficult for efficiency and resource utilization in elderly care to meet demand.

On the other hand, China is still facing the problem of insufficient financial security in the pension service mechanism. Although the size of the labor force has continued to shrink and the number of retirees has increased obviously since 2018, the coverage of basic old-age insurance for enterprise employees has increased significantly in the past decade, and the ratio of insured labor has increased from 25% in 2010 to more than half. However, further expansion of its coverage still faces many challenges[7]. In addition to the significant pressure on individual pension, the capital investment in pension machine service is still insufficient compared with social demand. This makes it difficult to meet the current and future needs of the growing aged population. Although the recent development of some private pension institutions has eased some of the pressure, due to the single source of funds, lack of financial investment and other problems, some nursing homes and community service points are difficult to support the upgrading of facilities, and there is a great pressure in the face of the needs of the elderly population.

4. Optimization Path of Elderly Care Service under the Background of Aging

4.1. Optimizing the Service Supply Structure to Achieve Precise Adaptation of Supply and Demand

In order to solve many problems and challenges existing in the aged care provision. It is necessary to optimize the service supply structure and implement accurate and appropriate service supply to meet the needs of different groups of elderly people. The needs of the elderly are not only medical care and treatment, but also the growing spiritual needs and psychological comfort needs of the aged. Government should increase the preference for the mental health resources of the elderly, expand and add facilities for entertainment and self empowerment of the aged, such as universities for the aged, community service points, etc. aged care provision institutions should also pay close attention to the psychological problems of the elderly, increase the detection of mental health in daily monitoring and physical examination, and prevent the depression, anxiety and other problems of the elderly.

Optimizing the service supply structure also takes into account the gap between urban and countryside aged care provisions. Facing the various needs of the rural elderly population, the government and society must increase investment in aged care provisions in rural and underdeveloped areas, update and maintain aged care provision facilities in rural areas, expand the supply of special care for the disabled and mentally retarded elderly, and make elderly care resources more equitable. The government can take the lead to promote the aged radiation of urban high-quality pension resources to countryside areas, drive the development of rural pension service resources, make modern pension service facilities benefit the elderly population in rural areas, and promote the inclusive development of pension services.

4.2. Improving the Level of Service Specialization and Standardize Service Quality

In China, long-term care services are mainly undertaken by family caregivers. In the process of disease diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation, this kind of care subject plays a key role and undertakes to provide professional and physical intensive care for family members [8]. As the most important form of providing for the aged, home-based care must improve the professional level of family care providers. Strengthen the training of aged care provision talents, establish a systematic training system, improve the professional skills and professionalism of nursing staff, improve the salary security mechanism, and attract more people to engage in the aged care provision industry.

It is very important to improve the service standards and evaluation system and formulate a unified service quality standard for the elderly. People must give consideration to scientificity, practicability and operability. Let service standards focus on the whole process and all fields of aged care provisions. People can establish a "training evaluation incentive" system, improve the salary and professional identity of service personnel, and formulate a unified national service standard and quality evaluation system. Combined with the physical and mental characteristics of the elderly and the needs of the development of the times, and taking into account the special requirements of special elderly groups such as disability and dementia, people should ensure the universality and individuation, pertinence and timeliness, and provide the whole process evaluation index for standardizing the aged care provision.

4.3. Improving the Pension Service Mechanism and Strengthen Collaborative Governance

In the face of pension needs, people should clarify the leading position of the Chinese government, and coordinate the relationship with various social forces, so as to make overall efforts and play a greater role. China should formulate a unified policy document to standardize factors such as long-term care coverage, fund-raising channels, donor groups, contribution rate and fund management, and ensure consistency among regional projects [9]. China must build a diversified and coordinated mechanism. It should not only clarify the government's responsibility for policy guidance, capital investment, supervision and security, but also strengthen the interaction of all parties by taking the

basic responsibility of the family, the responsibility of social participation, and the supplementary responsibility of the market.

The government needs to increase capital investment, improve the capital security mechanism, broaden the sources and channels of funds, especially pay attention to social donations and market financing, so as to improve the pension service mechanism with strong security and high stability. At the same time, in order to make full use of social and market forces and encourage profit-making and non-profit organizations to participate in long-term care services, government management departments should realize the transition from the past "direct service provision" framework to the new "social service purchase" framework. [10]. To develop Inclusive Finance and public welfare donations, facing the problem of low capital conversion rate, the government must improve the system supervision, supervise the flow of funds, and ensure the smooth flow and efficient operation of government funds and private enterprise funds.

5. Conclusion

This paper uses the method of literature research, combined with the actual background and actual needs of China's aging society, expounds the development status and basic demand characteristics of aged care provisions under the background of China's aging, analyzes the prominent problems faced by the current aged care provisions in the development, and puts forward the optimization path, so as to provide theoretical reference for the high-quality development of China's aging services.

At present, China has formed a pattern of aged care provisions led by the government and jointly by home, community and institutions. The coverage of basic services is gradually expanding, but there are still shortcomings. It is embodied in the imbalance and imperfection of service supply structure, uneven service quality and low specialization of service team. The service mechanism is not perfect, and there are also significant problems in the lack of coordination of multiple service subjects. These problems seriously restrict the performance of aged care provisions, and it is difficult to meet the growing demand.

In view of the above problems, this paper puts forward the optimization path of optimizing the service supply structure, improving the level of service specialization, and improving the collaborative governance mechanism. By taking into account the multi-level service demand, increasing the investment in aged care provisions in rural areas, strengthening the professional training of service team talents, improving the service standard system, strengthening diversified coordination, and broadening the source of funds, this paper solves the dilemma of the development.

Facing the future, China's aged care provision faces both challenges and opportunities. People should continue to deepen the reform of aged care provisions, refine and implement optimization measures, promote the government, families, institutions and markets to form a diversified and coordinated aged care provision pattern. Due to the perspective and data acquisition of this study, there are some limitations in literature review. Subsequent studies can combine specific regional cases to carry out more targeted empirical research, providing more accurate and powerful support for the optimization of aged care provisions.

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