

The Intervention of Social Work in Precision Poverty Alleviation: An Overview and Its Prospect

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Keywords: Social Work, Intervention; Precision Poverty Alleviation

Abstract: Precision poverty alleviation is a policy system with Chinese characteristics. The efficacy of precision poverty alleviation interprets the positive “spillover effect” of China’s poverty alleviation wisdom on the international anti-poverty cause. Social work and precision poverty alleviation are intertwined in many ways. Both Central and local governments have formed a systematic top-level design to support the intervention of social work in precision poverty alleviation. In some regions this intervention has also been carried out and has provided much valuable practical experience. The study shows a good trend of rapid development, and the academic field has achieved good results. At the beginning of this year, China’s fight against poverty has got a comprehensive victory, so the author makes an attempt to look back the existing research results and learns from the experience in order to make clear the thinking and the research trend, in the hope of finding the possible ways for the intervention of social work in poverty alleviation in the future.

1. Introduction

Anti-poverty thought has always been a common wish and mission for the development of human society since ancient times. The United Nations Millennium Development Goals, passed by the United Nations Summit in 2000, launched an unprecedented global campaign to eradicate poverty; in 2015, United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development calls for the promotion of the worldwide development agenda to end poverty, free from shortage and gain dignity. Poverty reduction in China has never been stopped since the founding of the People’s Republic of China. Poverty alleviation has been put in a prominent position in the governance of China, especially since the 18th National Congress of the Party. Following “precision poverty alleviation set forth by General Secretary Xi Jinping in 2013, a series of new ideas and theories have been put forward and a series of new decision-making and new arrangements have been implemented one after another, forming a precise poverty alleviation system with the participation of multiple subjects. Under the support of the top-level policy, recent years the intervention of social work force in the promotion of precision poverty relief has contributed to the accumulation of working experience and to the development of good research results. Many researchers have done lots of theoretical research and explored the practical aspects from different perspectives, therefore, the results, to some extent, provide both theoretical and practical guidelines for the intervention of social work in precision poverty relief, and promoted the predictability, operability and scientificity of the intervention.

At the beginning of this year, our fight against poverty has got a comprehensive victory. Our precision poverty alleviation and its success have drawn the worldwide attention from all societies and the international community as well. On the basis of existing domestic literature, with the combination of poverty alleviation practice, this article studies the intervention of social work in terms of the necessity, feasibility, overall strategy, the approaches, challenges and the representative practice patterns, then it looks forward the positive intervention and the part it will play in the future.

2. The Data

According to the statistics, hot issues about “precision poverty alleviation” are either about “precision poverty alleviation” practice or about policies related to it. First of all, since the strategic thought on “precision poverty alleviation” set forth in 2013, the research results and relevant literature are increased very fast, especially from 2016 till now. This shows that hot issues keep increasing as the related policy progresses. Second, the trend of research results and hot issues keeps the same pace with the research of “the precision poverty alleviation”, but the study to relate “social work” or to “the precision poverty alleviation” is a recent topic and the research results are merely of bits and pieces. This study has soon become a hot issue and it is still hot in this field.

3. Literature Review of the Intervention of Social Work in Precision Poverty Alleviation

3.1 Theoretical Review

3.1.1 The Necessity of the Intervention of Social Work in Precision Poverty Alleviation

There are a couple of mainstream views of whether it is necessary for the intervention. First of all, precision poverty alleviation and its practice are facing challenges. Based on the severe form of existing poverty and increment in our country, Li Yingsheng and other scholars propose that precision poverty alleviation urgently need the intervention of professional social work force^[1]. Second, the top-down administrative intervention has been born with defects, in addition, it is becoming more severe than ever that the government invests more to reduce poverty, but fails to work as expected. As the main component in the third division, social work can make up for the functional defect, since social work attaches more importance to the specialty, scientificity, the subject participation, support network construction, emphasizes the sustainability of ability promotion, service efficacy, and attends to resources link and rational allocation.

3.1.2 The feasibility of Intervention of Social Work into Precision Poverty Alleviation

All the literature comes to these classes of views: First, social work and precision poverty alleviation are of isomorphism, because both have affinity with each other in the idea of value. The accepted view in the academic field is that social work starts from the career and specialty to help the underprivileged. This altruism pursued in social work agrees with the original motive and nature of precision poverty alleviation. By citing other researchers' views, Gu Donghui explains the isomorphism of social work and precision poverty alleviation, from the social responsibility for individual survival and development, the professional responsibility of social work and the value of helping others to help themselves^[2]. Second is of the coupling of their ultimatum. Microscopically, on the one hand, precision poverty alleviation purports to integrate helping others to help themselves, self restoration and the empowerment into the self restoration and sustainability; macroscopically, they both share the same mission to reduce poverty and increase happiness, on the other hand. By dating back to the historical bases of professional social work production and development and of the anti-poverty practice, Zhang Zhihui comes to the conclusion that social work is born with the mission to help the poor and fight against poverty.

Next, precision service oriented by social work meets the requirement of precision poverty alleviation. Corresponding to the precision recognition, precision support, precision management and precision examination, social work gets to know the problems and requirements, makes individualized service plan, provides professional service, and assesses the closure of poverty cases and the follow-up procedures and criteria in order to realize precision poverty alleviation.

Third, social work has the professional advantages over the intervention in precision poverty alleviation. One is the advantage over working strategies. Researchers concern themselves with professional social work specialty, systematic and scientific working methods and procedures in order to promote precision poverty alleviation, and explore the professional breakthrough and potential strength. The other is the advantage on role-play. The research results mainly analyse the roles that social workers have actively played in various situations to make up for the administrative but unprofessional precision poverty alleviation. Wang Shousong makes an analysis the approaches

to the precision poverty alleviation practice and the responses to the roles of the social workers'^[3].

3.1.3 The Macro-strategy of the Intervention of Social Work in Precision Poverty Alleviation

In this field are the following representative classes of views: One view is that the intervention of social work in the precision recognition of the poor. Gu Donghui suggests “people in the field” perspective be used to analyse the causes of poverty and the controllable resources to identify the poor precisely and scientifically. Another view is to balance the problems relief and increase the objects. Exogenous blood transfusion can alleviate income-based poverty to some extent, however, it can do nothing to solve the ability-based poverty and right-based poverty. Nevertheless, social work excels at combining the exogenous pull and the endogenous driving mechanism organically, can introduce the service to the poor family and empower them to contribute to the realization of the independence to become rich. The third view is the establishment of collaboration among the multi-dimensional poverty alleviation. The major pattern of precision poverty alleviation in our country requires a high degree of socialization of the poverty alleviation participants, and the relevant subjects of poverty alleviation are each based on their advantages, linkage and mutual exchange, and collaboration; the fourth view is to promote the localization of social work in the poverty relief. Precision poverty alleviation takes on local characteristics; therefore, integrating the compatibility of social work, methods and techniques into local culture, strengthening its affinity and filtering should be the proper guidance for the intervention of social work in precision poverty alleviation.

3.1.4 The Approaches to Intervention of Social Work in Precision Poverty Alleviation

Related literature mainly focuses on the analysis of the following points. First, social work intervention needs the assessment which shows the basic characters of social work practice, because high degree of supply-demand service is the decisive procedure and important assurance for social work's intervention. This assessment can be specified to be an in-depth survey of poverty and its characteristics, all-round analysis of the causes of poverty; a detailed analysis of views of poverty alleviation and of the available resources and development disorders. Chen Hui explains how social work intervenes the analysis of causes of poverty from three aspects, that is, from multi causes of poverty, the explicit and implicit reasons and inadequate development capacity. Second, social work intervenes precision support^[4]. Based on assessing the needs for poverty reduction, the focus of work is to make and implement support plan. The aim of intervention involves the general goals and the specific goals, mission goals and procedure goals, of which the realization depends upon the operational intervention practices, in which the application of individualized principle, resources discovery and links are worth paying attention to. Xie Jungui is the first one to propose “social work precision” in precision poverty alleviation. He points out social work subjects should be directed to the causes of poverty for the poor and to the needs to reduce poverty, and they should provide the pertinently precise and fine services, involving enhancing the awareness of precision services, improving the ability of precision planning, selecting the pattern of precision services, and so on, and so forth. About how to make plans and come to actions, Chen Hui expounds two principles respectively, that is, considering fully the development ability of the poor, with the focus mainly on the development intention of the supported and their personal strengths, emphasizing to implement precision poverty and mobilizing to improve the self-ability of the supported poor. Xi Xiaoli specifies the “embedding and immersion” approaches to the intervention of social work in precision poverty alleviation. The embedding approach involves the third party identity, the community's intangible assets and social support network embedding, while “immersion” refers to the context, the idea and the method immersion. Wang Sibin believes the intervention of social work should focus on dot-plane structure, that is to say, the dot structure related to economy and the plane structure related to society, culture and psychology. The third is that social work intervenes scientific assessment and its follow-up. Scientific assessment purports to master the poverty alleviation efficacy and its follow-up, expecting to make sure the long-term poverty support is provided. This assessment should be always there in the whole processes to make sure that the

strategy can be adjusted and that the supported poor can be monitored to track their sustainability and prevent them from returning to poverty.

3.1.5 The Analysis of the Intervention of Social Work in Special Poverty Alleviation

There is not much research about the intervention of social work in the special poverty alleviation. Liu Fang and Luo Xu explains the possibility of how social work intervenes health poverty, the part social work intervention plays and the need for the intervention. It is its origin, idea requirement and occupational features of social work that make it possible to intervene in health poverty alleviation. Medical social workers can spread the interpretation policy, link resources and introduce capitals, and strengthening service mode, improving assessment ability and innovating service mode new requirements set for the intervention in health poverty relief.

Ma Dongdong and Sun Yajuan show the feasibility of the intervention of social work in education poverty alleviation from value concept fit and professional method advantages, and they also have a detailed explanation of such three aspects as education poverty alleviation, and poverty alleviation by means of education and the adoption of education to poverty alleviation.

About the intervention of social work in poverty alleviation by being relocated in different regions, Xiang Deping thinks social work participants need to focus on the psychological counseling, life support, ability improving and the integration into a new community. Zhang Bingqian, from idea introduction and practice intervention, explores the intervention of social work in poverty alleviation by being relocated to a different community.

3.2 Practice Research Review

Current in-depth development of precision poverty alleviation strategy falls upon the initial stage of the specialization, institutionalization and scientific development of social work. There are different researches of social work intervention in precision poverty alleviation. Some representative practice models have a leading role in demonstration throughout the country, but they face many challenges as well.

3.2.1 Working Mechanism of Three Societies Intervenes Precision Poverty Alleviation

So far there is little literature found in China about the intervention of the working mechanism of three societies in precision poverty alleviation. This strategy aims to extend the operational power for poverty alleviation, shifting our focus down to countryside or even communities in order to help poor regions and poor groups precisely. This intervention, based on the basic connotation of three-society linkage, is to couple the three systems of community, social organizations and social work into precision poverty alleviation practice. First of all, the external link serves as the basis of intervention. Under the guidelines of the largest consensus and common goals, the community is a comprehensive platform, social organizations are carriers, and social workers are the supporting force. After being coupled into specific field of precision poverty alleviation, the community, social organizations and social work need to build a team for precision poverty alleviation by physical linkage with each another. Second, the internal drive is key to this three-society linkage. The intervention of three-society linkage in precision poverty alleviation does not mean the mechanic superposition and combination of one after another, but instead the generation of internal drive, which is the outcome generated from the three-society working mechanism and which ensures the constant running of this mechanism and the well-going of its intervention. Gu Donghui thinks the strategy to keep internal drive intrigued is to strengthen the features of each component, to keep good interactions of all the components and to optimize the field of working system. Lin Shunli studies the localized approach to the intervention of three-society linkage in precision poverty alleviation on the basis of the “12307”elderly service model at Jingjiazhuang Village, Pingshan County, Hebei Province and the “124” service model for home-left people at Hei Yagou Village, Fuping County^[5].

3.2.2 Intervention of Shuangbai Practice model in precision poverty alleviation in Guangdong Province

Undoubtedly, community is the main field to carry out precision poverty alleviation. Guangdong Secretary for Home Affairs advances “Shuangbai Plan” which is a good attempt to involve social work in the “last meter” of precision poverty alleviation. Since the advancement of “Shuangbai Plan” in 2018, service programs have taken root in local areas and achieved success and benefited the community. “Shuangbai Plan” practice model intervening precision poverty alleviation emphasizes social work team to keep on cultivating the community, and the “53111” model oppositely targeted at the goal is the characteristic of program implementation. Social workers involved in “Shuangbai” Plan collect effective practical experience for the intervention of social work in precision poverty alleviation. The experience includes the following three aspects. The first aspect involves the choice of localized community model. “Shuangbai Plan” sticks to community-basis precision poverty alleviation, sets service goals, plans and develops professional service after assessing community poverty and the needs for poverty reduction through action research approach, with the purpose of rebuilding a community of self-assistance and mutual assistance. The second aspect involved is the formation of the service program benefiting sustainable social effect of precision poverty alleviation. “Shuangbai Plan” aims to break bottlenecks by providing five years or even a longer term of service and gradually contributes to the total change of current poverty; since, as has been previously mentioned, it is difficult for so many government-purchase social service programs to continue, because they cannot make use of long-term promotion of administrative leadership, short of in-depth service, limited in the participation of the poor. The third aspect is that the procedural goal of “Shuangbai plan” lies in community empowerment. Having long been rooted in the community, “Shuangbai Plan” social workers regard the poor groups are the real subjects in community development; therefore, the key to poverty alleviation is how to motivate the endogenous forces of the poor groups to play a good part as a peer and an ability builder as well.

3.2.3 Challenges Facing the Intervention of Social Work in Precision Poverty Alleviation

In the specific field of precision poverty alleviation, the localization of social work achieved phased success in the assistance of poverty support, but the arising problems and challenges cannot be neglected.

The first problem is that social work empowerment, as its professional strength, fails to give full play in the development of precision poverty alleviation. The idea of precision poverty alleviation indicates the shift from traditional relief concept to relief-assistance combination, and is put in a prominent place to improve the hemopoiesis function of the poor and of the poor areas, in combination with supporting the poor, the wise and the ambitious and to establish a perfect long-term mechanism to eradicate poverty. In principle, social work does help precision poverty alleviation by means of the external link, resources input, and the internal development of a deep cultural and spiritual support and of digging deep into the potential. However, in practice, social work fails to make use of its advantage in many regions. On the one hand, the majority of the poor are already accustomed to their poverty; on the other, the poor regions and the poor families tend to accept visible and tangible things as poverty alleviation resources. Lin Shunli says that social work does not play the role of supporting the intelligent and increasing the ability in poverty alleviation in Hebei Province; Ma Dongdong finds social workers play a very awkward role in poverty alleviation since the grass roots think only economic support counts.

The second problem is that the intervention of social work in precision poverty alleviation is trapped in a dilemma because of both the lack of professionals and a low degree of participation. Following Central Conference on Poverty Alleviation and Development at the end of 2015, both the central and local government pass a series of policy documents to support the involvement of social work force in precision poverty alleviation with the unprecedented strength, speed and density, such as “Decision of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Winning the Fight Against Poverty” in 2015, “Notice of the State Council on the Issue of the 13th Five-Year Plan” in 2016, “Notice of the leading Group on Poverty Alleviation and Development under the State Council on the issuing ‘the Action Plan for the Poor with Disabilities to overcome Poverty (2016-2020)’” and

“Guidance of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, Ministry of Finance and the State Council Poverty Alleviation Office on supporting social work professional forces to participate in poverty Alleviation” in 2017 and “Guidance of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Three-Year Action to Win the Fight Against Poverty” in 2018, which all are the top-level policies to support the assistance of social work to precision poverty alleviation. However, social work professionals in the service of “Three-Society Plan”, social work education plan for poverty alleviation ” and social work service institution’s “Hand-in-hand Plan” involve a limited scope and inadequate number of exported social work professionals. Xi Xiaoli, according to her survey of N city in Henan Province, finds social work institutions and professionals participating in precision poverty alleviation are small in number and weak in doing things.

Third, the disadvantage of program working model is becoming the bottleneck for social work to help establish a long-term mechanism for poverty eradication. Currently, China’s social work embedded in precision poverty alleviation focuses its attention on the efforts to eradicate poverty of civil affairs deployed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, of which the government’s purchase of social work service and the program working model help to strengthen the performance management of the purchase objects by the buyers and to decrease the service cost and to accelerate the development of service and the important social work service institutions. Nevertheless, the government purchase of social work service lasts only one year, when social work professional service is still developing and just about to achieve some phased success to gain recognition, it comes to an abrupt end, and few can be followed up, so the intervention in the alleviation cannot be linked with follow-up consolidation, and the service objects easily come to a dilemma that they have been eradicated from poverty but returned to poverty again later. Ma Dongdong does an empirical study of the poverty eradication in B city in Yunnan Province, and puts forward social work program working model causes the weakness in sustainable development^[6].

4. The Prospect of this Research

First, it is urgent that social work intervene the follow-up improvement in the post poverty alleviation phase. In poor regions, especially in the poverty-stricken regions, fragile ecological environment, poor infrastructure, industries and social cultures are intertwined, and poverty consolidation, multi-dimensional poverty and the mobile poverty become prominent; besides, after the poverty eradicated, the poor and the poor areas experience the identity transformation, and government support gets reduced, which pose a great test to the sustainable development ability for those people and those areas that have been eradicated from poverty, therefore, in three or five years, there is a high risk of returning to poverty due to the fragile environment, lack of capacity, accidents or the breach of policy support.

Social work intervenes the follow-up improvement, and first of all it needs to a dynamic monitoring of the management mechanism for those lifted out of poverty, to help departments track and monitor the population and areas out of poverty. Especially, social workers should pay more attention to the marginalized people to prevent them from returning to poverty again. Moreover, those who already return to poverty, are to be considered whether it is necessary to put them into the poor group again. Second is that social work keeps implementing follow-up policy after its intervention. “Policy on poverty eradication” requires the policy keeps on working for a period of time; after social work intervenes the follow-up assistance, it needs to take into consideration both spiritual and material support, helps to get rid of the resistance to the sustainable development for those lifted out of poverty, and consolidates the success of poverty alleviation and avoid returning to poverty .

Second, It is a necessary choice to revitalize rural areas after social work intervenes the follow-up improvement. The Nineteenth National Congress pointed out that the imbalance between urban and rural development is the biggest imbalance in China's development, and that rural areas fail to develop fully is the greatest underdevelopment. The gap between urban and rural areas is still a prominent problem faced by the future poverty alleviation and. Compared with the urban

areas, rural areas are generally faced with such development bottlenecks as institutional restrict, prominent social exclusion, public service, social administration lagging behind, economic social capital and ecological poverty.

5. Conclusion

Based on what is previously stated, social work intervenes precision poverty alleviation in all aspects. The necessity and feasibility of the intervention together with macroscopic strategy and specific approaches show that social work has been a driving, reconstructive, complementing and innovative forces for precision poverty alleviation. Victory in fighting against poverty 2020 does not mean the end of poverty alleviation and anti-poverty, because, poverty alleviation and anti-poverty are always on their way, and they are never terminated. The research of the intervention of social work in precision poverty alleviation is just a start; with the profound advancement of poverty alleviation, still more problems are worth exploring. How to better realize the function complement and service complement of social work in poverty alleviation will remain a continuous topic.

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