

Family Care of the Elderly: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract: Population aging will be the main feature of human development in the 21st century, so the 21st century is also called the century of population aging. It is predicted that the elderly population in China will exceed that of children and teenagers in 2030, and the total dependency ratio will rise due to it, so the pressure of caring for the elderly has become a prominent social problem. The caring for the elderly mainly involves three aspects: economic support, life care and spiritual comfort. Therefore, owing to the unique cultural value and function of the three aspects, family support might be weakened as time going, but it will not die out. Family support will remain the main support model for the elderly in a considerable period of time.

1. Introduction

In modern society, the issues caused by population mobility, family structure changes and the transformation of traditional family values have a profound impact on the research of family care. With the development of society, what are the effects and challenges of family care? How should the government protect the rights and welfare of the elderly from the perspective of policy formulation? This article will discuss the two questions mentioned above.

2. Discussion

2.1 Merits and Effects of Family Care

Family function theory believes that, as a continuously running dynamic system, the family has its own functions, and the exertion of family function effects has a direct impact on the individual's physical and mental health, emotions, etc. (Cao Hailing, and Zhao Jilun. 2019) The elderly mainly cared by the family members get higher degree of life satisfaction.

In terms of spiritual comfort, family care for the elderly has its unique advantages, and its role is concentrated in satisfying the needs of the elderly for emotional communication. As the physical function of the elderly declines, their psychological quality will also be weakened. If their emotional needs are not met, they are prone to symptoms such as loneliness and depression. In severe cases, various elderly mental illnesses may occur. The elderly are a group that tends to feel lonely. Data from the 2006 China Urban and Rural Elderly Population Tracking Survey (Guo Ping, Chen Gang. 2006) shows that the proportion of urban elderly "often feeling lonely" is 20.82%, and rural elderly " The proportion of "often feeling lonely" is 34.40%. In addition, a number of domestic surveys on the mental support of the elderly also show that there is a serious shortage of mental comfort for the elderly, and the mental loneliness of the elderly in rural areas is particularly prominent. It can be seen that family care is beneficial to the physical and mental health of the elderly.

2.2 Challenges of Family Care

However, family care for the elderly also faces many challenges, such as the miniaturization of family size, the mobility of family members, the reduction of inter-generational and family cohesion, and the weakening of traditional filial piety. Firstly, the smaller the family size is, the weaker the social foundation of family care security will become. Since the implementation of the

one-child policy in China, the population growth rate has been stable, but the pressure on the elderly is huge, it is a common scene in Chinese society that a young couple has to support four elderly people. As the problem of population aging has become prominent, the Chinese government has begun to implement the “two-child” policy, but this policy has not worked, the birth rate has shown a fluctuating downward trend in the past decade. Secondly, the mobility of population becomes a trend with the rapid development of urbanization. Consequently, a large amount of labor, especially the young and middle-aged population, flows from rural areas to medium and large cities, which greatly affects the family care of the elderly. This has also resulted in a substantial increase in empty-nest elderly families and left-behind elderly families, which poses great challenges for the elderly. Thirdly, the inter-generational and family cohesion of Chinese families is decreasing. With the historical and cultural development of the times and the increasing pressure of family care for the elderly, the values of family members are diversified and differentiated, and family centripetal force has been influenced, which is not conducive to the stability of family relations and the support of the elderly. Fourthly, the traditional sense of filial piety is gradually weakening. The Chinese society, which is deeply influenced by Confucianism and Mencius, is undergoing tremendous economic and cultural changes. Western values are gradually infiltrating young groups and affecting traditional value of filial piety. More and more people will not kidnapped by filial piety again, young and middle-aged people have new perspectives of family care.

2.3 Policy Formulation as Part of the Solutions

The existing policies of caring for the elderly mainly focus on community and social support, but pay little attention to family care. How should the government overcome the above difficulties and challenges through policy formulation and improve the function of family pensions?

First of all, establish and improve the legal system to guarantee family care for the elderly. China is a country bases on law governance, and that is the reason why the law should fully cover all aspects of the lives of the residents, however, civil litigation about family care disputes is quiet commonly seen on social media, reflecting the legislative problem. The implementation of “Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly” in 2013 introduced “come home and visit” concept into the law, marking the end of the rule of filial piety and the rise of the legislation of family care. Nevertheless, the existing laws on family care in China are scattered, unsystematic, and poorly implemented. Therefore, the government should add special laws and regulations to establish a comprehensive and systematic legal system for pension protection. For example, most elderly people will not turn to the judiciary unless they are desperate for the sake of maintaining the parent-child relationship. Even if the law is satisfactorily resolved the disputes between two generations, they can only legally simplify the issue of support to the supply of money, it is unfair to the lonely elderly who cannot take care of themselves but suffer from loss of family love.

Second, increase the inclusiveness of policies, and pay attention to the balance of coverage of rural and urban elderly. The existing policies have two major characteristics. First, the existing policies are more of a special policy for the elderly in extreme poverty and disability. They lack universality and policy inclusiveness. Second, the policies emphasizes the formulation of family care for the left-behind elderly, the charity support policy to assist the elderly, and the talent incentive policy for the elderly in rural areas in China, which lacks the preference for the elderly in urban places. In fact, the elderly in urban places are also facing the economic and health pressure, high medical expenses and living expenses, and some of the elderly may also have huge economic pressure to help young people get a foothold or buy a house in cities.

Besides, increase the attention of neighborhood committees, communities, and property management offices to elderly residents and strengthen third-party supervision. In order to ensure that the property and health of the elderly are not infringed upon, it is necessary to strengthen third-party supervision of the society. In China, news about the unfulfilled responsibilities for the elderly are common on TV or newspaper. For example, Yang Guanghua, an elderly living in Baihe, sick into bed, and her children refused to take care of the elderly due to the uneven division of the elderly’s property. She asked the neighborhood committee for help. The staff came to mediate and

persuaded her children to sign a mediation letter several times, dividing property rights of the elderly into several parts. For the children, the family dispute has only come to an end. The help and supervision from outside of the family are always crucial and necessary. A positive example is that a number of communities in Beijing work on community space planning and transforming, making the living condition of the elderly is improved and safe enough.

Additionally, the government may increase preferential policies for social enterprises and provided social entrepreneurs with funds, resources, technique and information support. Encourage more members of the public to participate in the care of the elderly, assist family care for the elderly, and provide convenient services for family care for the elderly, such as meals, medical and health care, home care, day care, and cultural entertainment, etc., supplementing the weakness of family care for the elderly. For example, some communities in Shanghai use comprehensive network applications to solve the housekeeping services, maintenance services, transportation services, catering and shopping, etc. needed by the elderly population. Scientific and technological services also make possible various remote services such as education and health, especially the community application of electronic health records, which can help the service integration of hospitals, community hospitals and family doctors for the elderly.

3. Conclusion

With the rapid aging of the population in China, the family care for the elderly in urban and rural areas needs to be guaranteed. The government, society and individuals all need to pay full attention to the physical and mental needs of the elderly to establish an elderly-friendly society. In the context of the new era, in order to solve the problem of family care and supplement the weakness of it, the formation of a distinctive elderly care model in urban and rural communities according to local conditions are needed urgently. A technical application plan, a social governance construction plan, and a public policy formulation and implementation plan are necessary to be designed considerably and carefully for the sake of the welfare and human rights of the elderly in China. The whole society should offer a comprehensive package of assist for family care providers and make it possible and practical for the elderly to enjoy a better life.

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