

# The Construction of Community Care System for Urban Elderly from the Perspective of Social Work

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to explore in depth the role and influence of social work in the construction of a community care system for the urban elderly, in order to provide theoretical support and practical suggestions for the enhancement of care services for the urban elderly. Specific objectives include: analyzing the current situation of the community care system for urban older adults, with special attention to the role of social work in it. To explore the impact of social work perspectives on the construction of community care systems for urban older adults, and to provide targeted strategies and recommendations to strengthen these systems, this paper improves the quality of services and the quality of life for older adults. This study adopts a mixed research methodology, including qualitative and mixed methods of interviews and questionnaires, in order to comprehensively understand and analyze the role of social work in the construction of community care systems for urban older adults. Existing literature was analyzed to understand the current situation of the community care system for urban older adults, the role of social work, and related research experiences at home and abroad. This paper conducts semi-structured interviews and invite urban social workers to share their experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding community services for the elderly. Through in-depth interviews, the practical operation and impact of social work in the care system are explored. Interviews were also conducted with older people in the city to explore their feelings and needs about the community care system for older people. A questionnaire survey was used to collect the views and opinions of older people in the city and to quantify the needs of older people in the city. The urban elderly are not very aware of or satisfied with elderly care services, but have high needs for medical services, rehabilitation services and long-term care. Satisfaction with the existing national welfare system is not very high, leading to a low tendency to go to nursing homes. Because of the seriousness of loneliness and stress among the urban elderly, they are in urgent need of social and cultural activities to release stress and alleviate loneliness. Social work plays a key role in the construction of community care system for the urban elderly, providing comprehensive support and services for the elderly. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations are made to strengthen the training, resource input and policy support of social work in the care system to promote the improvement of service quality. The findings of the study provide a theoretical basis and practical guidance for the future construction of community care systems for the urban elderly, and provide useful references for social workers and policy makers.

## 1. Introduction

The aging population is defined as those aged 60 years and older, and the living conditions, health, economic status, and impact on social and urban development of this group are the focus of community work [1]. Currently, China's demographic structure is experiencing unprecedented rapid aging, which is even faster than many other Asian countries such as Japan, as well as developed countries in Europe and North America [2]. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), at the end of 2023, there will be approximately 279 million people in China aged 60 years or older, with more than 217 million of them aged 65 years or older. The National Health Commission expects that by around 2035, the number of elderly people aged 60 and above will exceed 400 million, accounting for more than 30 percent of the total population, and the country will also enter a stage of heavy aging. And by 2050, the number of elderly people will reach a high of 450 million.

The senior population (over 80 years old) will increase even faster than any other age group, and is expected to reach 115 million by 2050, from an estimated 94.48 million projected in 2023. As the number of elderly population increases, the number of people with disabilities will also increase. According to relevant studies, the number of elderly people with disabilities will increase by more than 7 million every five years until 2035, with the most dramatic increase occurring during the 10-year period of 2021-2030, when the number of elderly people with disabilities will increase by more than 10 million every five years. By 2050, the size of the disabled elderly in China reaches 103 million. The proportion of elderly persons with disabilities who are of advanced age will continue to rise as the life expectancy of the population continues to lengthen; in 2030, elderly persons with disabilities will account for only 23.2 per cent of all elderly persons with disabilities, but by 2040, they will have risen rapidly to 30.7 per cent, and by 2050 they will have risen to 43.3 per cent, making the size of the elderly population with disabilities 4.3 times larger than it was in 2010.

The trend towards population ageing has far-reaching implications for the social and economic development of cities [3]. This trend is not solely influenced by declining fertility rates, but is also driven by improved healthcare. Improvements in medical care have allowed people to live longer, which in turn has led to a growing elderly population. The trend of population aging can have far-reaching effects on the social and economic development of cities. As the elderly population grows, the demand for social services such as pensions, health care and long-term care will gradually increase, while posing more pressing challenges to the social security and medical service systems. At the same time, as more and more people from rural areas migrate to urban areas, and as China's one-child policy has resulted in a reduction in the size of China's average bottle family, the country's traditional model of family care for the elderly is shifting, with multi-generational families gradually being replaced by smaller or empty-nest families, posing new problems in the care of the elderly. Moreover, as the elderly population increases, social participation, cultural activities, and protection of the rights and interests of the elderly have become more important. In 2015, China abolished the one-child policy, however, this policy adjustment is unlikely to slow down the rate of population aging [4]. In addition, because of the decline in physical function, the elderly are also more likely to acquire a variety of chronic diseases in old age, such as: cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, osteoarthritis, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, etc., and the elderly will be disabled due to the increase in the incidence of these chronic diseases [5], which poses a new challenge to the demand for social health care resources and the layout of the social pension services in China. All of the above not only challenge the organization and function of urban society, but may also pose a threat to urban economic development. Therefore, it is urgent for the Chinese government and relevant authorities to re-plan the social security and healthcare service system to better cope with the multiple pressures brought about by population aging.

Social work, as a professional field focusing on the quality of life of people, plays a crucial role in the care of the elderly. Social workers provide support for the elderly in all aspects by providing psychological support, solving life problems, and promoting social integration [6]. The role of social workers is not only to provide substantive help, but also to maintain the dignity of the elderly, improve their quality of life, and promote social equity. Although social work plays a key role in the care of the elderly, the current community care system faces a series of problems and challenges, such as insufficient resources, unbalanced services, and lack of customized services. Therefore, this study aims to gain insights into how social work influences the design, implementation, and improvement of community care systems for urban older adults. By focusing on the role of social work in promoting the well-being, social integration and equity of older people, the study is expected to provide valuable references and recommendations for future practice and policy.

This paper will first provide a review of the existing relevant literature and an in-depth discussion of the current status of the community care system for the elderly in urban China, as well as domestic and international strategies for the elderly care system. Through an in-depth analysis of the impact of social work on the design and implementation of the system, this paper will provide theoretical guidance and policy recommendations for future practice. Subsequently, this paper will

detail the research methodology used in this inquiry, which is a mixed method of qualitative analysis with interview and questionnaire methods, as well as the specific steps of sample selection, data collection and analysis. Finally, the results of this study are hoped to provide theoretical guidance and policy recommendations for informing future practice. Through this study, this paper expects to promote the continuous improvement of the community care system for the urban elderly, provide better quality services for the elderly, and promote the sustainable development of the society.

## **2. Related Words**

### **2.1 The current situation of the community care system for the elderly in urban China**

From the 1950s through the 1990s, the Government of China completely underfunded and provided formal long-term care for welfare beneficiaries, the majority of whom were older persons with no children or family. The Government continues today to provide full cost of living and long-term care for the "three noes" (no ability to work, no source of income, and no family or relatives to support them). In rural areas, these people are often referred to as the "Five Guarantees", and local governments provide them with food, clothing, housing, transportation, health care, and funeral expenses. For older persons outside the welfare system, the family has traditionally been the primary caregiver, but due to the one-child policy, rapid urbanization, and increased mobility of the labor force, kinship care has become increasingly strained as families have shrunk in size and dispersed. This has led to a surge in demand for care and the emergence of formal long-term care (LTC) [7].

However, because long-term care facilities are an emerging industry in mainland China, nursing staff lags far behind the mature nursing industry abroad in terms of numbers as well as skills. For example, the literature on nursing homes (NHs) in China consistently shows that there is an extreme shortage of qualified NH staff at all levels, including caregivers, administrators, nurses, and medical professionals [8]. Studies have shown that not only is there a shortage of NHs in China compared to developed countries, but there is also a large gap in the skill and quality of care provided. The majority of nursing staff in Chinese NHs have little or no nursing training and have systematically learned nursing skills, and most are unlicensed. In addition, NHs in China have hardly prepared any qualification standards and regulatory requirements for NH staff. Long-term care services are an emerging industry in China, so staff training programs can be developed from scratch using a patient-centered approach to care, utilizing state-of-the-art technology and knowledge from other countries. The article synthesizes the known literature describing services and technologies about advanced NH in other countries. The article points out that there is a serious lack of qualification standards for NH staff in China, and that because of the different ages and education levels of nursing staff in China and the West, Western staff qualification standards are not fully applicable to the situation in China, and that policy makers in China should provide reasonable qualification standards for NH staff in China, taking into account the situation of nursing staff in their own countries [9].

In addition, for most Chinese seniors, the cost of formal long-term care is out-of-pocket. The average pension per retired worker in China in 2022 was RMB 3,158/month, which translates to an annual figure of about RMB 38,000/year, while just one private nursing home in slightly better condition costs RMB 5,000/month. With the lack of pensions and the high price of nursing homes, this affordability is an issue for many.

### **2.2 Impact of social work on system design and implementation**

Social work plays an important role in the design and implementation of the elderly care system, and its impact is reflected in a number of ways: social workers understand the specific needs, living conditions and support systems of older persons and their families through communication and assessment. This helps to accurately formulate individualized service plans to meet the specific needs of the elderly. Social workers are responsible for integrating various resources in the

community, including medical services, social activities, and psychological support. By coordinating these services, social work helps to establish an integrated system of care for the elderly and improve the coverage and quality of services. Social workers provide psychosocial support to help older people cope with life changes and emotional distress. Such support helps to improve the mental health of the elderly and enhance their ability to adapt to life. By organizing community activities and facilitating the participation of older persons in social and cultural activities, social workers promote community integration of older persons. They can also become advocates for the rights and interests of older people, fighting for more social resources and ensuring that older people are treated fairly in the community. Social workers intervene when older people are facing crises, assessing their risk profile and guarding against potential problems. This helps to identify and address early health, economic or social risks that older people may face. Social workers raise awareness of the elder care system among older adults and their families through training and educational activities. This includes training on how to access and utilize community services, maintain health, and solve problems. Social workers can participate in the process of formulating and improving elderly care policies and provide professional advice to the government and the community. By understanding the actual needs, they can provide practical information to policymakers and promote the continuous optimization of elderly care policies.

In general, social work, through its professional knowledge and skills, provides all-round support for the design and implementation of the elderly care system, and is committed to improving the quality of life and social integration of the elderly.

### **2.3 Domestic and International Strategies for Elderly Care Systems**

Japan is one of the countries in the world where ageing is most pronounced, and it is seriously affecting the normal functioning of its social security system, medical care and nursing system. For this reason, the Government of Japan has proposed the establishment of a "community-based comprehensive care system" to comprehensively protect the medical care, nursing care, prevention, housing and livelihoods of the elderly. The implementation of the "community-based comprehensive care system" requires an increase in the number of personnel engaged in community-based comprehensive care and a full understanding of the physical and mental characteristics of older persons by these health and care professionals. It has been pointed out that the most important thing for the successful implementation of the "community integrated care system" is to train health care and nursing professionals and students who are engaged in, or wish to engage in, health care for the elderly in the future, and therefore it is necessary to strengthen the education of health care and nursing professionals and students who are engaged in the field of health care and nursing for the elderly [9].

Germany has implemented a number of strategies in the area of care for the elderly, aimed at improving their quality of life and meeting their needs. Germany has established a robust social security and pension system to provide financial support for older persons. This includes the provision of retirement pensions, old-age pensions and long-term care insurance to ensure the economic well-being of older persons. Germany focuses on the development of long-term care services, including the provision of home care, community care and nursing home services. The Government supports older persons in need of long-term care through social long-term care insurance. A wide range of well-being services for older persons are provided, including day care for older persons, cultural activities, rehabilitation services, etc. This helps to improve the quality of life and social interaction of older persons. Germany is committed to providing housing and community facilities adapted to the needs of older persons to ensure that they can live in a safe and comfortable environment. Older persons are encouraged to participate in social activities, and various activities such as cultural, sports and social activities are provided to promote the social integration and participation of older persons. The German Government encourages the continued participation of older persons in the labor market by providing a number of employment opportunities adapted to older persons in order to promote their economic independence and social participation. Comprehensive health services and medical care are provided to ensure that older

persons have access to high-quality medical services and medication. We need to pay attention to the mental health of the elderly and provide psychological counseling and support services to address possible mental health problems. Together, these strategies have built a relatively sound system of care for the elderly in Germany, aiming to meet the multifaceted needs of the elderly and provide comprehensive support and care. However, as the aging trend continues, the government may need to continually adapt and improve these strategies to meet the changing needs of the elderly population [10].

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1 Research design**

##### **3.1.1 Qualitative research methods**

Qualitative analysis methods aim to provide in-depth understanding and interpretation of non-numerical data [11], such as text, images, and sound. Compared with quantitative methods, qualitative analysis emphasizes the qualitative understanding of phenomena and focuses on describing, interpreting and understanding the complexity and diversity of the research object. Qualitative analysis methods are usually more flexible and open, and the researcher can continuously adjust the research direction according to the analysis results during the research process [12]. This is different from quantitative research in which pre-determined assumptions and frameworks are set. Qualitative research can collect data from a variety of sources, including observations, interviews, and text analysis. This allows the researcher to synthesize different types of information and gain a more comprehensive understanding.

This paper adopts a qualitative research methodology to collect qualitative data on the care system of urban elderly through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. This methodology helps to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives, experiences and feelings, revealing the complex social phenomena behind them.

##### **3.1.2 Mixed methods of interview and questionnaire methods**

A mixed methods approach is an elemental research design that combines different research methods to gain a fuller understanding of the research question. A mixed methods approach combines both interview and questionnaire methods of data collection to capitalize on their strengths. When using mixed methods, the researcher uses both interviews and questionnaires for data collection. This can be done by alternating between the two methods in the same study or by applying them both to the same sample. Questionnaires are used to collect information by giving respondents a structured or semi-structured questionnaire. This method is suitable for large-scale data collection, enables the acquisition of quantitative data, and allows respondents to fill in the questionnaire in their own time and place. Interviews are a face-to-face or remote method of communication in which the researcher speaks directly to the respondent to gain insight into their views, experiences and perceptions. Interviews usually provide more detailed and qualitative data, revealing the subjective feelings of the respondents and the meaning behind them. In a mixed methods approach, the researcher synthesizes and analyzes the data from questionnaires and interviews. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, the researcher can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research question and dig deeper into the meaning behind the data. With mixed methods, different data sources can be used for validation. For example, the questionnaire can be used to validate some of the findings in the interviews, or the interviews can be used to explain some of the trends in the questionnaire, thus increasing the credibility and validity of the research results. Mixed methods have the advantage of being able to overcome the limitations of single methods and provide a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the study. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, researchers can better answer complex research questions.

### **3.2 Sample selection**

A representative group of urban older persons was selected for the study to ensure that the sample covered a range of ages, economic levels, health conditions and social backgrounds. This helps to capture a diversity of views and experiences and makes the findings more generalizable. Social workers and service providers working with older people in the city were selected as another sample group, including community workers, healthcare providers, staff of social support organizations, etc. The sample was selected to include a wide range of older people from the urban areas. They were able to provide professional insights into the functioning and improvement of the care system.

### **3.3 Data collection and analysis**

Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted to open up a dialog with urban older adults and social workers about their expectations, needs, experiences, and recommendations for the care system. Open-ended questions were used to prompt participants to describe their views and experiences in detail.

### **3.4 Statistical analysis**

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaires were statistically analyzed. This helps to identify differences, trends and correlations between different groups, providing quantitative support for making policy recommendations.

By synthesizing qualitative and quantitative research methods, the study can provide a comprehensive understanding of the current situation, problems and potential solutions of the care system for the urban elderly, and provide insights for future improvements.

## **4. Results And Discussion**

### **4.1 Analysis of the results of interviews with urban older persons and social workers**

Through interviews with urban older adults and social workers, this study gained insights into the urban elder care system. The results of the interviews are analyzed below:

#### **4.1.1 Needs and challenges of urban older persons**

(1) Demand for services: Elderly people in the interviews generally expressed the need for more diversified and personalized services. They wanted more comprehensive medical, social and psychological support.

(2) Financial pressures: Many older people mentioned financial challenges, particularly the mismatch between pensions and the cost of care, with the cost of formal care services remaining a burden for some older people.

#### **4.1.2 Expectations of social workers**

(1) Individualized services: Older people expect social workers to have a deeper understanding of their individual needs and to formulate service plans that are more relevant to the actual situation.

(2) Information transfer: Social workers were expected to be more active in transferring information during the interviews, including information on welfare, medical care, community activities, and so on, to help the elderly better integrate into the community.

#### **4.1.3 Challenges and Strategies for Social Workers**

(1) Inadequate resources: Social workers commonly cited the problem of inadequate resources, both human and financial. This affects their ability to provide comprehensive services.

(2) Coordination of services: In order to better meet the diverse needs of older people, social workers need to better coordinate various types of services to ensure that older people have access to comprehensive support.

(3) Training and professional development: Social workers identified a need for more training

and professional development opportunities to enhance their professionalism in caring for older people.

#### 4.1.4 Positive impact of social workers

(1) Psychological support: Social workers have played an important role in psychosocial support, helping older persons cope with life changes and emotional distress and improving their mental health.

(2) Community integration: Social workers have successfully promoted community integration of the elderly and enhanced their social interaction by organizing community activities and promoting participation.

#### 4.1.5 Suggestions for improvement strategies

(1) Increase resource inputs: Improve support for social workers, including increased human and financial resources, to better meet the needs of older persons.

(2) Strengthen training programs: Design and implement more comprehensive training programs to enhance the professionalism of social workers so that they can better adapt to the diversity and complexity of care for the elderly.

(3) Enhancing information transfer: Strengthening communication between social workers and older persons, improving the efficiency and comprehensiveness of information transfer, and ensuring that older persons are fully aware of the services and resources available to them.

(4) By gaining a deeper understanding of the needs and challenges of older persons and social workers, the urban elderly care system can be improved in a more targeted manner, so that it can be better adapted to the diversity of older persons' needs and the quality and effectiveness of services can be enhanced.

## 4.2 Analysis of questionnaire results

The questionnaire was designed according to the research task, following the requirements for questionnaire design for surveys on elder care systems. In total, a total of 52 urban elderly people were interviewed in this study. In order to test the reliability of the questionnaire, the designed questionnaire was retested using the retest method to repeat the test on the research subjects respectively, with a time interval of 3 days, and the data were substituted into the R formula, and the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was calculated to be  $R = 0.882$ , which indicates that the reliability of the questionnaire survey has a high standard of reliability test [13]. Table 1 shows the analysis of the results of the questionnaire survey of urban elderly people (1-5 represents the degree of deepening).

Table 1: Analysis of questionnaire results for urban elderly people

	Averagevalue	Samplesize	Standarddeviation	P-value
Level of awareness of urban elderly care services	3.21	52	1.035	
Evaluation of satisfaction with existing elderly care services in the city	2.79	52	1.035	
Demand for medical services, rehabilitation services, long-term care, etc.	4.63	52	1.205	.0075
Individualized demand for social workers	3.79	52	.915	
Demand for social and cultural activities	3.83	52	1.078	
Whether you feel emotional states such as loneliness, stress, etc.	3.98	52	1.126	.0085
Expectations for age-friendly housing, amenities	3.88	52	.963	
Satisfaction with the existing national welfare system	2.65	52	1.083	.0070
Degree of inclination to go to a nursing home	2.38	52	1.207	

From the results of the survey and analysis, it can be seen that the urban elderly are not very aware of or satisfied with the elderly care services, but have a high demand for medical services, rehabilitation services and long-term care. The p-value between satisfaction with the existing national welfare system and the tendency to go to nursing homes is .007, which shows that there is some correlation, so it can be said that the tendency of the elderly to go to nursing homes is not high due to the fact that the satisfaction with the existing national welfare system is not very high. The p-value of .0085 between the feeling of loneliness and stress and the need for social and cultural activities shows that there is a correlation, so it can be said that because the feeling of loneliness and stress is more serious among the elderly people in the city, they are in urgent need of social and cultural activities to release the pressure and alleviate loneliness.

## 5. Conclusion

In this study, the current situation, problems and possible solutions of the care system for the urban elderly are explored in depth through qualitative analysis and a mixed method of interviews and questionnaires. The results show that the current care system suffers from insufficient resources, unbalanced services and insufficient participation of the elderly. Meanwhile, the social work perspective plays a key role in the care system. By emphasizing individual dignity, community integration and whole-person care, the social work perspective provides important guidance for the construction of a community care system for urban older adults. Social workers' practical experience in psychosocial support, community participation, and resource integration provides depth and breadth to the design and implementation of the care system.

Based on the findings, this paper presents the following recommendations to guide practice:

- (1) Enhance communication and cooperation between social workers and older adults to facilitate the accurate development of individual service plans.
- (2) Improve the diversity and inclusiveness of community services to ensure coverage of older adult groups with different levels and needs.
- (3) Strengthen the training of social workers to enhance their professionalism in mental health, community participation and well-being of the elderly.
- (4) Establish support networks for older persons and promote mutual assistance among older persons and community integration through the guidance of social workers.

The major findings of this study include problems with the care system, the importance of a social work perspective, and possible directions for improvement. These findings provide insights into the current state of the care system for urban older adults. Limitations of this study include limitations in sample selection and limitations in research methodology. The sample may not be sufficiently comprehensive to represent all groups of older adults, and the choice of research methodology may affect the comprehensiveness of the findings. Future research could focus on gaining insights into the characteristics of care for older people in different cultural contexts, as well as more comprehensive social work interventions and policy development. The scope of the study could also be expanded to focus on the role of technology in elderly care, as well as comparing care systems in different cities on a global scale. By summarizing the study and discussing its limitations, it is expected to provide guidance for future research in related areas and useful suggestions for the improvement of actual care systems.

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