

The advantages and paths of social workers intervening in the construction of elderly friendly communities

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Abstract

To build an elderly friendly community that can actively respond to aging and meet the diverse needs of the elderly, it is necessary to have a livable community living environment during construction, which can meet the requirements of full social participation of the elderly and high-quality community services. At present, the construction of elderly friendly communities in China faces certain difficulties in terms of funding for aging friendly renovation, social participation of the elderly, and services. As professionals who are compatible with the construction of elderly friendly communities, social workers should actively apply professional theoretical knowledge and skills, intervene in the construction of elderly friendly communities through various optimization paths and the play of different functions and roles, promote problem solving, and improve the construction of elderly friendly communities.

Keywords

Elderly friendly community; Social workers; Optimize the path; social participation

1. Introduction

The aging of the population and its response are real problems facing the world today. The diverse demands brought by the growing elderly population also pose new challenges to community work. Therefore, it is urgent to establish a community environment that is friendly to the elderly as soon as possible to actively respond to the arrival of aging. At present, the construction of elderly friendly communities is receiving increasing attention. Based on relevant research on the construction of elderly friendly communities, this article mainly analyzes the difficulties faced in the construction of elderly friendly communities in China, and combines the high degree

of compatibility between social work and the requirements of elderly friendly communities to provide more professional talents and effective ways to solve community problems and promote the construction of elderly friendly communities.

2. The connotation of elderly friendly communities

2.1. Structural Model of Elderly Friendly Community Construction

For "elderly friendly communities", different scholars and institutions abroad have also used different terms such as "elderly friendly community livable community", "lifelong community", and "all age community". At present, relevant research on elderly friendly communities in China has achieved corresponding results. Li Xiaoyun summarized the content framework of elderly friendly communities into two dimensions: material environment and social environment. [1]The material environment dimension focuses on the infrastructure of the community and the architectural environment of the design standards, aiming to meet the different living needs of elderly people in the community. The social dimension pays attention to the quality of social relationships among elderly people, promoting social inclusion, participation, and personal development; Zhang Jia'an proposed that elderly friendly communities should not only provide necessary infrastructure and care services for the elderly to maintain their physical and cognitive functions and existing living conditions, but also include corresponding opportunities for promoting personal development in social interaction and participation. [2]By summarizing relevant research, it can be found that the research content basically includes three levels: living environment, social participation, and service. Therefore, in the construction of elderly friendly communities, efforts should be made to achieve the complementarity of community living environment, social participation, and service levels, so that age is no longer a barrier for the elderly, and to ensure that the elderly can live happily, healthily, and joyfully in the community.

2.2. Standards for the Construction of Elderly Friendly Communities in China

The construction of elderly friendly communities aims to create a livable environment, convenient travel, thoughtful services, and fully participatory living place for the elderly. Community construction needs to meet corresponding requirements in three aspects: living environment, social participation, and service.

2.2.1. Livable living environment within the community

According to the characteristics and living needs of the elderly, a livable community living environment should be planned and designed separately for indoor living space and outdoor community environment. The layout of indoor living spaces should be improved reasonably, and facilities and equipment that elderly people may need, such as handrails and emergency call devices, should be installed[3]; The

outdoor community environment should strengthen hygiene and cleanliness, promote barrier free construction, equip public facilities that match the daily needs of the elderly, and install related supporting facilities such as night lighting.

2.2.2. Adequate social participation

The community should start from three aspects: the participation rate, participation ability, and participation opportunities of the elderly, in order to improve their social participation. Firstly, it is necessary to make good use of the activity facilities and venues within the community, organize and carry out diverse activities, and increase the participation of the elderly; Secondly, by conducting community training activities, we can enhance the participation skills of the elderly, compensate for their lack of participation experience, increase communication and interaction between the elderly and the outside world, and improve their social participation abilities; Finally, the community should help, guide, and organize elderly people to participate in community construction activities, fully leverage the positive role of the elderly, and ensure their participation opportunities.

2.2.3. High quality community services

High quality community services require the community to have a variety of service projects that can provide timely elderly care, medical care, mental health, and legal aid services that the elderly need; To introduce various professional talents in medical, legal, nursing and other fields, and improve the professionalism of the services provided by existing community staff[4]. At the same time, it is necessary to optimize the way community services are provided, keep up with the trend of the times, introduce and use intelligent technology and equipment while retaining traditional service methods, and improve the intelligence level of community services.

3. The realistic dilemma of building elderly friendly communities

At present, the construction of elderly friendly communities in China faces the following practical challenges in order to achieve livable living environments, full social participation of the elderly, and high-quality community services.

3.1. The funding pressure for aging friendly renovation is high

The aging friendly renovation of old residential areas is an important part of building elderly friendly communities, and the significant financial pressure is a major practical dilemma that affects the progress of the renovation. This dilemma mainly comes from three aspects: firstly, a large number of old residential areas were not designed for aging at the beginning of construction, and the existing spatial structure layout makes it difficult and costly to renovate for aging; Secondly, it is difficult for social forces to participate in community aging adaptation and transformation. Xu Xiaoming pointed out in his research that the participation of social forces in the

aging friendly renovation of old residential areas has corresponding subject identities that are difficult to obtain, and faces certain difficulties in the subsequent operation of idle state-owned assets in old residential areas[5]. This has a significant impact on diversified fundraising and increases the financial pressure for aging friendly renovations; Thirdly, when carrying out aging friendly renovations on residential properties, elderly people who only own one property may not be able to afford the economic and time costs of the renovation, which puts financial pressure on the aging friendly renovation of individual residences.

3.2. Weak participation status of elderly people

The current dilemma of weak participation of elderly people in the construction of elderly friendly communities mainly includes the following two aspects: on the one hand, the participation situation is poor. For example, in their research on the social participation mode of the elderly, Xie Lili and Wang Bin used a latent category model to divide the social participation mode of the elderly into high participation type, low participation type, and family care type. Among them, the proportion of low participation type is the highest; On the other hand, the weak social participation of the elderly is also related to their poor access to information. Zhang Jiali and others pointed out in their research that many community residents are older. Because they are not skilled in using the Internet, and do not pay attention to and be insensitive to new media information, it is difficult to obtain relevant information, which affects their substantive participation in the transformation of old communities[6]. There is a certain threshold for the use of digital technology. The elderly's unskilled use of the Internet will also affect their timely access to information, thus affecting their participation.

3.3. Low level of community elderly services

Elderly friendly communities have put forward higher requirements for community services, and existing services have problems such as insufficient diversification of services, low degree of service specialization, and poor perception of community intelligent services. For example, in terms of diversified services, elderly friendly communities have exposed the drawbacks of single service content in elderly care services during the construction process; In terms of specialization, the level of service specialization is usually closely related to the professionalism of the service provider themselves. Data shows that as of the end of 2020, there were 4.338 million community workers nationwide, while by the end of 2022, there were a total of 931000 certified social workers in China, and the proportion of certified professional community workers was not high; In terms of community intelligent services, elderly people are prone to falling into the "digital divide" due to the lack of digital literacy accumulation, making it difficult for them to truly enjoy the convenience brought by community intelligent services.

4. The compatibility between social work professionalism and the requirements for building elderly friendly communities

The professional advantages played by social workers in intervening in the construction of elderly friendly communities can be demonstrated from three levels: philosophy, theoretical methods, and practice and roles, which are highly compatible with the construction of elderly friendly communities.

4.1. The compatibility of ideas

From a conceptual perspective, an important principle of the social work profession is to assist individuals in self-help. The compatibility of this concept is reflected in the fact that social workers should apply the concept of self-help when intervening in the construction of elderly friendly communities. They should not only help alleviate or solve the difficulties faced in community construction, but also strive to cultivate the self-help and mutual assistance awareness of the community and its residents, improve their ability to solve problems independently or collaboratively, and ultimately achieve high-quality construction of elderly friendly communities.

4.2. The compatibility of theoretical methods

From the perspective of theoretical methods, social workers have rich theoretical knowledge, diverse work methods, and strong applicability, which are suitable for guiding social workers to intervene in the construction of elderly friendly communities. For example, the advantage perspective theory mastered by social workers can guide them to discover and apply the advantages of the community when intervening in the construction of elderly friendly communities, thereby better assisting in solving problems; The regional development model and social planning model in community work methods also have positive significance in solving community problems and promoting community construction.

4.3. The compatibility between practice and role

From the perspective of practice and role, social workers are able to intervene in a wide range of practical fields by utilizing a rich variety of professional theories and work methods in practice. When social workers intervene in various practical fields, they play multiple roles and calmly handle various complex problems encountered, demonstrating another professional advantage of social workers, which is the diversity and complexity of their roles. The application of these two advantages is highly compatible with the construction of elderly friendly communities. Social workers can intervene in various fields such as the elderly, families, and communities by playing multiple roles such as resource linkers and policy influencers, helping communities and residents within them solve problems.

5. Optimization Path for Social Work Intervention

Faced with the practical difficulties in the construction of elderly friendly communities mentioned above, social workers can try to intervene from the following aspects by leveraging their own functions and roles, combined with the specific situation of community construction, to help alleviate the difficulties faced in community construction.

5.1. Summarize experience and promote policy improvement

The role of social workers as policy influencers can play an important role in helping to solve or alleviate the financial pressure that arises in the construction of elderly friendly communities. In response to the problem of difficulty in obtaining corresponding subject identities when social forces participate in the aging transformation of old residential areas, as well as the subsequent operation of idle state-owned assets in old residential areas, society can summarize the successful experience that has been gained. Taking the experience summarized by Xu Xiaoming in his research on the renovation of old residential areas in Lugu Street, Shijingshan District, Beijing as an example, the street adopted an integrated bidding form of "investment+engineering+operation services" in the implementation of the renovation project of old residential areas. Government subsidies were used for the renovation of basic projects, while self owned funds from social forces were invested in the renovation of upgrading and improving projects. At the same time, by incorporating some idle and inefficient spaces within state-owned property rights in the community as a social investment return method into the integrated bidding, a breakthrough has been achieved in the "franchising" approach to the original limitations of state-owned asset leasing and lending policies. The above successful experiences provide ideas for solving similar problems. Social workers should carefully summarize and scientifically analyze them based on the specific situation of the local community, and promote the construction of elderly friendly communities.

5.2. Establish links to improve resource status

Linking financial resources based on the actual situation of elderly housing renovation is another effective way for social workers to help solve or alleviate the financial pressure of building elderly friendly communities beyond policy influence. Firstly, social workers can raise funds and corresponding materials such as hand-rails and emergency call devices for aging friendly renovation by linking enterprises, charitable organizations, and caring individuals to donate, which can alleviate the financial pressure faced by elderly people in residential aging friendly renovation to a certain extent; Secondly, social workers can connect with human resources, such as aging friendly renovation personnel, medical staff, legal professionals, and other professionals, to identify residents in the community who are familiar with the environment and resources. By combining the two parties, precise community services can be achieved, enhancing the trust of the elderly and improving the efficiency of

aging friendly renovation, saving renovation costs; Finally, social workers can also connect material resources. By linking idle houses, information equipment, and other physical resources within the community and nearby institutions, the construction of learning venues can be achieved, providing corresponding support for the elderly to learn information technology and helping them adapt to intelligent services as soon as possible.

5.3. Survey and analysis to improve elderly participation

The reasons for the weak participation status of elderly people are complex and diverse, and the degree varies. Social workers can use their professional skills and techniques, such as questionnaires and other professional methods, to quickly collect basic information about elderly people in the community, as well as to explore the backbone of community residents, especially elderly residents. The backbone of elderly residents can improve their subjective participation willingness through their own demonstration and driving role, and gather and drive more elderly people to participate in the construction of elderly friendly communities. In this process, social workers should also establish a communication mechanism, which can help them better understand the progress of community residents' work, timely answer questions and clarify doubts, and improve work efficiency; On the other hand, social workers can timely understand the real-time dynamics within the community and accurately analyze the actual impact of various factors on the elderly through communication and exchange with key community residents. At the same time, timely and effective communication can broaden information channels and establish new bridges for mutual communication and information transmission between community residents, social workers, and the community.

5.4. Organize training to create a self-service atmosphere

Professional social workers have received professional education from schools and supervision from professional institutions, so they can play an important role in training community workers and the elderly. Social workers can provide professional training services for community residents and other non professional workers in terms of professional theoretical knowledge and skills, accelerate the transformation of non professional community workers and residents, and improve the efficiency of training services. At the same time, social workers can also provide training services for the participation ability and use of information technology of some elderly people. On the one hand, the participation of elderly people in training activities itself is also a form of participation; On the other hand, the lack of skills and techniques for participation and the environment for learning information technology are important reasons that affect the participation and better adaptation of elderly people to intelligent services. Therefore, social workers can alleviate related problems by conducting training. During the process of providing training ser-

vices, social workers should also pay attention to the concept of helping others and creating a self-help atmosphere. Social workers should help community workers master relevant skills and enhance their ability to independently use work techniques to solve community problems in their future work. At the same time, social workers should also help the elderly learn the skills and techniques of participating in various activities and using various information technology devices, so that they can independently participate in community activities and elderly friendly community construction, and demonstrate good adaptability when facing different intelligent devices and services in the future.

6. Conclusion

Creating a community environment that can better meet the needs of elderly care and enable them to live a healthier and happier life is an important measure to actively address population aging. At present, the creation of elderly friendly communities in China is gradually underway, but in the process, there have been difficulties such as high funding pressure for aging friendly renovations, weak participation of elderly people, and low levels of community elderly services. As professional workers, social work should fully leverage its role and intervene in the construction of elderly friendly communities through policy influence, resource linkage, investigation and analysis, organizational training, and other means to help solve corresponding problems and promote the improvement of elderly friendly community construction.

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