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Dilemma and Path for Rural Mutual Aid Elderly Care Model in Underdeveloped Areas——A Case Study of Dazhou City in Sichuan Province

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Abstract Rural mutual aid elderly care, as an emerging elderly care model, has become an exploration and attempt to rebuild rural communities in the process of rural social transformation. At present, in the vast underdeveloped rural areas, the rural mutual aid elderly care model is faced with such problems as imperfect policies and regulations, insufficient funds, single service items, lack of professional services, and limited functions of civil organizations. It is necessary to strengthen the formulation and improvement of laws and regulations, and to ensure the stable source of funds, enhance the level of specialization, and give full play to the functions of social organizations in the rural mutual aid elderly care model, so as to promote the sustainable development of the rural mutual aid elderly care model.

Key words Rural mutual aid elderly care, Social organization, Restricting factors

1 Introduction

Rural mutual aid elderly care was originated from the first mutual aid nursing home established in Feixiang County, Hebei Province in August 2008. The biggest feature of this model is that the government can support it, the village can afford it, and the farmers can use it. The rural mutual aid elderly care model is a new elderly care model between pure social elderly care and home-based elderly care. It is a new model of home-social elderly care and is an extension of home-based elderly care and conforms to the demands of the rural areas^[1]. Dazhou City is located in the eastern part of Sichuan Province, south of Daba Mountain, at the junction of Sichuan, Yunnan, Shaanxi and Hubei provinces. As an old revolutionary base area of China, Dazhou City is relatively backward in the overall economic and social development level, has a large population and a weak foundation. Most of areas of Dazhou City are labor exporting places, and the problem of family empty nest is very serious. With the strict implementation of the family planning policy, the people's living standards have improved significantly, and the medical conditions have generally improved. The elderly population in Dazhou has shown a explosion trend. The family structure is changing to the core family as the main part, the population movement is increasing, the empty nesters are increasing, and the economic competition is intensifying. These factors reduce the ability of adult children to care for their elderly

parents, and the elderly care function undertaken by the family is inevitably becoming weak. Dazhou City is a big labor export city, the population movement is great. More and more children go to urban areas to work, leading to more serious problem of empty nest of the elderly. These problems have become an important point and an important gripper for Dazhou City to build a well-off society in rural areas. Governments at all levels and relevant departments, as well as the whole society must fully understand the seriousness of the challenge of population aging, set up the awareness of aging, and enhance the urgency and consciousness of coping with the population aging and the challenges of an aging society^[2].

The rural mutual aid elderly care model is gradually being launched in the rural areas of Dazhou. However, in general, the rural mutual aid elderly care model has just started. There is no mature model in the whole country, and the level of economic and social development in rural areas is unbalanced. The rural mutual aid elderly care model is still in the preliminary exploration stage both in practice and in theoretical research.

2 Dilemma in the development of rural mutual aid elderly care model

The base number of rural aging population in Dazhou City is increasing, and the number of empty nesters, left-behind and elderly people is increasing, providing sufficient growth momentum and space for the development of rural mutual aid elderly care. The construction of rural mutual aid nursing home has become an exploration and attempt to rebuild rural communities in the process of rural social transformation. To a large extent, it has played a great role in implementing various policies benefiting rural areas and farmers, improving rural conditions, and rebuilding various relationships including neighborhoods, relatives, and intergenerational relationships of the family. More importantly, the emergence and development of rural mutual aid nursing home has become an important way to improve the elderly care environment

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and the life quality quality of rural people and improve the happiness index. However, as a new thing, the rural mutual aid elderly care model has many restrictions such as imperfect policies and regulations, insufficient guarantee funds, single service projects, lack of professional services, and limited functions of non-government organizations.

2.1 Imperfect policies and regulations for rural mutual aid elderly care model

Mutual aid elderly care has received close attention of is valued by the Civil Affairs Bureau of Sichuan Province and the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and its development will have a good policy environment.^[3] However, according to our consultation and survey of related policies and regulations, the present policies and regulations for rural mutual aid elderly care model in Dazhou City are still not well established. The "legislation first" principle is still not implemented and followed in the rural mutual aid elderly care model. (i) There is no legal guarantee for the rural mutual aid elderly care model in the development process. The national level policy guarantee in the rural mutual aid elderly care status has not yet been issued. It is only the relevant notice issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. These become the large uncertain factors for the development of the rural mutual aid elderly care model. (ii) The operation of the rural mutual aid elderly care model lacks definite policy support and legislation support. Without clear operation method, various problems will arise in the process of rural mutual aid elderly care, consequently affecting the normal development of the rural mutual aid elderly care model. According to our survey, all the counties and districts in Dazhou City are currently promoting the rural mutual aid elderly care model, but there is no unified policy document in the elderly care places, funding sources, staffing, and service specifications closely related to the rural mutual aid elderly care model. This greatly contributed to the chaotic situation of the current rural mutual aid elderly care model. (iii) The rural mutual aid elderly care model lacks a perfect supervision mechanism. According to our survey, many elderly people stated that there are problems of unclear fund disposition, unfair material allocation, and getting commissions from equipment purchase in the rural mutual aid nursing homes. However, for specific matters, there are no exact evidences. These greatly influence the play of social benefits of the rural mutual aid elderly care model. Therefore, the establishment of a "fair, open and just" supervision mechanism has become an urgent requirement for the sustainable development of the rural mutual aid elderly care model. (iv) The rural mutual aid elderly care model lacks the regulation for identifying the responsibility for accidental injuries. For the elderly people living in the rural mutual aid nursing homes, there may be various unavoidable accidents, but the responsibilities for accidental injuries are difficult to determine. Generally, before the elderly people deciding to live in the nursing homes, village level organizations may sign a contract between the elderly people and their children to make the elderly people and their children take the responsibilities. Such contract may solve the simple problem that have clear responsibilities,

but for injuries that can not define responsible subjects clearly, it is difficult to identify responsibilities. This is a real issue hindering the benign development of the rural mutual aid nursing homes.

2.2 Unstable funds for mutual aid elderly care model

In China, the rural mutual aid elderly care model is, in nature, the model of "collective building of the nursing homes, centralized living, self guarantee, and mutual aid service". Collective building means the village collectively contributes funds or uses the collective idle houses to build mutual aid nursing homes, and bears daily expenses such as water, electricity, and heating; the county finance provides appropriate subsidies for the construction, operation, living facilities, and daily necessities of the rural mutual aid nursing homes. As regards the centralized living, on the principle of children filing the application and the voluntariness of the elderly, the empty nesters who are 60 years old or above and could take care of themselves, children sign a contract with the village committee, then the elderly could live in the nursing homes free of charge. The self guarantee means the children of the elderly bear the food and clothes and medical expenses of the elderly. Mutual aid service means that there is no full-time worker in the nursing homes, and the elderly people live together through mutual aid^[4]. Simply speaking, the running subjects, management subjects, and responsible subjects are the village collective, and the elderly people live voluntarily and in a centralized manner.

The rural mutual aid elderly care model is closely related to the level of economic development, the level of capital investment, and the status of infrastructure construction, and is greatly restricted by economic factors. Funds affect local economic and social development. Similarly, rural elderly care cannot be separated from sufficient funds. According to our survey, the rural mutual aid elderly care model in Dazhou City is basically implemented in accordance with the general idea of "village collective running, society making donation, and government providing support". However, in the process of development, the fund shortage has become a bottleneck restricting normal operation of the rural mutual aid elderly care model. Due to the imbalance of rural economic development, the reduction and exemption of agricultural tax and the direct subsidy of grain and agriculture in Dazhou, the rural collective economy in Dazhou has low income and limited economic capacity. It is difficult to provide sufficient funds for the construction of rural mutual aid nursing homes and to maintain long-term operation. Dazhou is in a remote mountainous area, the degree of social development is low, the development of charitable awareness is slow, and the resources for social donation are scarce. Some schools or institutions basically provide some condolences to the elderly during the holidays, and their support for the development of rural mutual aid elderly care model is just a drop in the ocean. In other words, funds from input of the village collective and support of social forces are not completely stable, the financial support of government is main fund source for the development of rural mutual aid elderly care in Dazhou City. According to the *Implementation Opinions of Dazhou Municipal People's Gov-*

ernment about *Accelerating the of Development of Elderly Care Industry* (Da Shi Fu Fa^[2014] No. 24), it provides 30 000 yuan subsidies for new construction of rural mutual aid nursing homes, and provides annual 2 000 yuan subsidies for operation of nursing homes under the premises of reaching the standard of service quality evaluation. According to the actual situation of the construction of rural mutual aid elderly care nursing homes, the construction start-up funds and supporting funds are paid by the local village committee. After the acceptance is passed, the village committee will obtain the government's financial subsidies. This is another challenge for the village committee. According to the calculation of a village committee, the current financial subsidies can barely guarantee the construction of the infrastructure. The 2 000 yuan operation subsidy is far enough to realize benign operation of rural mutual aid elderly care nursing homes. According to our survey of a famous rural mutual aid elderly care nursing home in Dazhou, the land rent is up to 3 000 yuan annually, so it is very difficult to maintain the operation of rural mutual aid elderly care nursing homes just relying on the financial subsidies of the government. In addition, the rural mutual aid elderly care model of Dazhou City is still at the starting stage. With the increase in the demands of the elderly people for mutual aid elderly care, the demands of funds will be greater, it will bring about more serious fund shortage, and consequently leading to difficult to maintain the rural mutual aid elderly care.

2.3 Single service items and lack of professional services in the rural mutual aid elderly care model The essence of rural mutual aid elderly care model is low age caring the advanced age, healthy people caring weak people. With the increase in the demands of the elderly people, only diversified and professional elderly care services may attract the elderly people and guarantee the sustainable development of rural mutual aid elderly care model.

According to our survey, the rural mutual aid elderly care model in Dazhou City has the problem of single service items and lack of professional services. (i) In the planning of service items, in order to meet the needs of quantitative assessment, the village committee and local government pay more attention to the purchase and setting of advanced facilities and equipment, but ignore the construction of diversified models; they pay attention only to the satisfaction of the basic material needs of the elderly, but neglect the spiritual level of the elderly, such planning ideas have seriously restricted the actual effect of the rural mutual aid elderly care model. (ii) In the specific service content, the current rural mutual aid elderly care model in Dazhou is still in the preliminary exploration stage. The elderly still live in their own homes. They generally choose to eat at home and then help each other to entertain and fitness. A few rural mutual aid elderly care nursing homes can provide some simple daytime care, the service objects are also those elderly people who can take care of themselves, and even some rural mutual aid elderly care nursing homes have become local mahjong clubs. (iii) From the perspective of service functions, it is still difficult for the current rural mutual aid elderly care nursing homes to provide elderly care services for the elderly

who cannot fully take care of themselves. For the elderly who are most in need of mutual said elderly care services, the elderly who are sick at home cannot take care of themselves, so that the function of "mutual aid" is lost, which is far from the real sense of mutual aid for the elderly. Finally, the elderly care service is a comprehensive technology that covers professional and scientific services. It must use a variety of techniques, skills and methods when carrying out the work of the elderly care services. However, according to our survey, there is no special service and management personnel in the mutual aid elderly care nursing homes, it basically relies on the self management and services of the elderly people. The elderly people have almost no techniques, skills and methods for the elderly care services, and rural health services and public service facilities are relatively weak, making it difficult to provide the necessary technical support.

2.4 Limited functions of the non-government organizations in the development of rural mutual aid elderly care model

No-government organizations are civil organizations. They are the result of social structural differentiation and an important part of the social self-organization system derived from the continuous separation of social political systems from other non-political systems. Generally, they are public welfare organizations or serve a specific group of people. The non-governmental organizations are civil and self-governing. For this, it means that they are institutionally independent of the government, do not belong to the government system, and are not subject to government authority^[5]. In recent years, various non-organizational or semi-official organizations in China with the elderly as the main body have flourished. In both rural and urban areas, many communities or villages have established non-government organizations such as "the elderly association" and "elderly volunteer association". Such non-government organizations are playing a great role in China's elderly care system that is difficult for government and enterprises^[6]. According to our survey, there are few non-government organizations in rural mutual aid elderly care model in Dazhou City. Only the elderly association may play a certain role. However, because the elderly association is not perfect in the mechanism construction, the functions of the elderly association are limited in the rural mutual elderly care model. (i) The current elderly associations of various village committees lack official recognition. According to the current social group management requirements, the registered capital should reach 30 000 yuan, then they may be registered in the civil affairs department. For the current financial situations, it is difficult for them to meet this condition. Even though the elderly care associations have documents approved by the towns (residential districts), most of the elderly care associations are not registered or filed in the civil affairs department. (ii) The management system of the current rural elderly care associations is not standardized or just remain in name. Due to the rise of the migrant work, numerous rural elites flow out, it is difficult for elderly associations to attract talents. Most areas set up the elderly associations just for coping with the inspection, and the elderly associations

lack corresponding regulations. Finally, the construction of rural elderly associations also is faced with various constraints of actual conditions. The rural public service facilities are relatively backward, the conditions are poor, and the elderly live in relatively scattered places. At present, the elderly associations only organize some elderly people to carry out recreational activities. They fail to play their leading role, and it is difficult for them to support the rural areas and also difficult to exert a positive impact on the development of the rural mutual aid elderly care model.

3 Path of rural mutual aid elderly care model

The rural mutual aid elderly care model is a strategic choice that is adapted to the current rural social economy. However, the pressure-based system has brought about a top-down target task contracting system, leading to the dilemma of the development of rural mutual aid elderly care model^[7]. According to the actual situations of rural areas in Dazhou City, the development of rural mutual aid elderly care model must stick to the principle of government responsibility, multiple party participation, self assistance and self service, suit measures to local conditions, and provide classified guidance, and build different degrees and scale of mutual aid elderly care nursing homes according to current social and economic situations of Dazhou City, as well as economic carrying capacity of the local village collectives.

3.1 Strengthening formulation and improvement of policies and regulations for rural mutual aid elderly care model The mutual aid elderly care model, as a new model conforming to the current situations of rural elderly care. The establishment of rural mutual aid elderly care model should follow the principle and rule of "legislation first", and it needs further regulation and support of government. Establishing the status of rural mutual aid elderly care in the country and social and economic life in the form of law is not only a necessary prerequisite for the smooth implementation of the rural mutual aid elderly care model, but also an important guarantee for the basic rights and interests of the rural elderly^[8].

Firstly, it is required to incorporate the village-wide elderly care system into the rural social undertaking development plan, and include the rural mutual aid elderly care model into China's rural security system, and establish feasible implementation standard and operation method, to guarantee the development of rural mutual aid elderly care model under the legal guarantee and supervision, and avoid the responsibility shifting due to excessive general policies in the actual operation, so as to make the mutual aid elderly care really bring benefits. Secondly, it is required to strengthen legal supervision mechanism of rural mutual aid elderly care, regulate the operation and management of rural mutual aid elderly care funds by legal means, rather than merely applying ethical or moral principles. Thirdly, it is required to establish an evaluation mechanism with participation of multiple parties, especially the participation of the elderly people. Finally, it is required to establish the accidental injury responsibility confirmation mechanism for the mutual aid elderly care, and safeguard the elderly

from serious injury due to accidental injuries.

3.2 Ensuring stable funds for mutual aid elderly care model

The shortage of funds severely restricts the healthy development of the rural mutual aid elderly care model. It is necessary to further expand the funding channels and establish a comprehensive and diversified and long-term stable fund raising based on existing financial allocations, collective investment in the village, and social donations. mechanism.

Firstly, it is required to strengthen the leading role of the government in the rural mutual aid elderly care model, guide the government to invest more in the elderly care, incorporate the mutual aid elderly funds into the financial budget, and expand the financial support, to ensure healthy operation of the rural mutual aid elderly care nursing homes. Secondly, government and related administrative departments should formulate and improve more policies to benefit farmers, energetically develop rural economy, raise the economic strength of village collective, and raise the fund raising capacity of the village collective. Thirdly, it is recommended to take full advantage of all reasonable resources to combine the construction of rural mutual aid nursing homes with the construction of new socialist countryside, and to maximize the role of various social resources in mutual aid elderly care services. Finally, it is recommended to promote the change in the concept of rural elderly and family members, rural mutual aid for the elderly is not to reduce the family's responsibility, the family still should take the main responsibility of the elderly care, and must pay the corresponding financial effort and energy.

3.3 Enriching the service contents of rural mutual aid elderly care model, and improving the professional level of the mutual aid elderly care

Diversified services that meet the needs of the elderly are the basis for the survival of the rural mutual aid elderly care model. Improving the professional level of mutual aid elderly care is the source of the development of the rural mutual aid elderly care model. In order to promote the long-term healthy development of the rural mutual aid elderly care model, it is necessary to enrich the contents of rural mutual aid elderly care model, and improve the professional level of mutual aid elderly care.

(i) It is necessary to ensure the normal development of basic service contents such as daytime care, culture and entertainment in the rural mutual aid elderly care model, and flexibly set specific service contents according to the actual situation of local area. (ii) Rural mutual aid elderly care services can be connected with rural health clinics, using health clinics in rural communities to provide health care and other services for the elderly, and strengthening medical tracking services for the elderly through the construction of medical records for the elderly and rural doctors. (iii) It is necessary to expand the public service content of the rural mutual aid elderly care nursing homes, fully utilize the current social concerns about elderly care, and actively contact lawyers, psychological counselors, social workers, volunteers, *etc.* to provide public services for the elderly free of charge, safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of the elderly, and improve the

quality of life for the elderly. (iv) It is necessary to organize related elderly care service experts regularly or irregularly to go to rural mutual aid nursing homes to conduct basic nursing training for local healthy elderly who participate in mutual aid elderly care, teach them techniques, skills and methods of elderly care services, and improve the professional level of mutual aid elderly care.

3.4 Bringing into full play functions of the social organizations in the development of rural mutual aid elderly care model According to the development of rural mutual aid elderly care in Dazhou City, it is difficult to ensure the long-term operation of rural mutual aid elderly care nursing homes by merely relying on village-level organizations. It is necessary to raise the rural mutual aid elderly care to the height of the whole society and concentrate various forces to promote this model. Therefore, there is an excellent social foundation for bringing into full play functions of the social organizations in the development of rural mutual aid elderly care model.

(i) Relevant government departments should advocate the establishment or active introduction of elderly care social organizations, and provide policy support in terms of registration, tax reduction, assessment and evaluation, and attract more social organizations to work on rural mutual aid elderly care model. (ii) It is recommended to bring into full the functions of civil organizations, such as the strength of the elderly in the village community, the high-ranking elderly in the pure rural areas, and promote elderly associations or highly respected seniors truly dominate the mutual aid elderly care model, and truly give the authority to elderly associations^[9]. (iii) It is recommended to strengthen the important functions of social organizations in operating the mutual aid nursing homes, undertaking and organizing public welfare charitable donation activities, and volunteer activities, and further improve rural mutual aid elderly care service system. (iv) It is recommended to further improve the democratic supervision mechanism of social organizations to the rural mutual aid elderly care model, ensure fair, open, and just operation mechanism of rural mutual aid elderly care model, and raise the trust of the public in the rural mutual aid elderly care model.

4 Discussions

At present, the rural mutual aid elderly care model is gradually carried out in many rural areas of China. However, there are still no theoretical discussions about the basic issues such as the responsibility of the government, society, family, and individual elderly care service providers, and how the relationship between the various subjects should be handled. The lack of research on the relationship between related subjects will present more and more problems in the practice of rural mutual aid elderly care. Originally, the rural mutual aid elderly care is an innovation in the way of family care for the elderly. It is a non-government act that helps the elderly to help each other. However, in the actual

process, if it changes to the government investing in rural areas to build elderly care facilities, and then the relevant government departments will conduct assessments, it will become an actual government act, we will have to say that it is a failure of the rural mutual aid elderly care model.

Therefore, in the future research of rural mutual aid elderly care model, we should pay attention to the following aspects: What duties should the government, society, village committee, elderly people and family members shoulder undertake in the rural mutual aid elderly care service? Which objects are served by the government? Which objects are assumed by themselves and their family members? The family is the main provider of traditional elderly care. Will the large-scale implementation of mutual aid for the elderly pose a challenge to family elderly care in some respects? How to reflect family responsibilities when developing rural mutual aid elderly care services? Such problems should be studied in depth in theory, to make clear the respective responsibilities of the government, village committees, families, individuals and social organizations in the provision of elderly care services, so that they can achieve a balance of coordination, and ultimately establish a kind of new social elderly care service system with various responsibility subjects sharing, balancing, and coordinating respective benefits.

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