

Research on the “Property Management + Elderly Care” Model in the Context of Negative Population Growth

Yun Wu^{1*}

¹ College of Politics and Public Administration, Guangxi Normal University, Guilin, China

Email Address

3226283013@qq.com (Yun Wu)

*Correspondence: 3226283013@qq.com

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Abstract:

Since the beginning of the 21st century, China's population aging has been intensifying, gradually entering a period of deep aging. In 2022, China's population experienced its first negative growth. Traditional home-based and institutional elderly care can no longer meet the huge elderly care demand market in China. Therefore, it is extremely urgent to innovate the community-based home-based elderly care model. In this regard, welfare pluralism offers us an inspiration: encourage the government to outsource elderly care services to appropriate social organizations, and diversify welfare providers. The innovation of property management companies' participation in community-based home care for the elderly might bring about a new and promising future for community-based home care. At present, the “property management + elderly care” model is still in the pilot stage and faces problems such as a shortage of professional talents, limited supply, and low service levels. In addition, the negative image of property management enterprises in the public's mind in the past has also brought barriers to the development of elderly care services. Based on this, the author has put forward corresponding countermeasures from three aspects: filling the talent gap, reshaping the image, and increasing capital investment.

Keywords:

An Aging Society, Negative Population Growth, Property-based Elderly Care

1. Introduction

According to international standards, China entered an aging society as early as 1999, and its population age structure has entered the aging stage. At that time, the population over 60 years old in China accounted for ten percent of the total population of China. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the degree of population aging in China has continued to deepen, and the phenomenon of negative population growth has occurred for the first time in nearly 61 years. In 2022, China's population experienced negative growth. It is obvious that this poses a huge challenge to China's elderly care issue. Traditional home-based and institutional elderly care can no longer meet the huge elderly care demand market in China. In the 14th Five-Year Plan, the

Central Committee of the Communist Party of China proposed to “build an elderly care service system that integrates home-based, community-based and institutional care, and combines medical care with elderly care.” The community-based home care model for the elderly precisely responds to the call of this policy guideline. However, as a grassroots unit, the community’s energy is still limited after all. Therefore, in recent years, the state and various provinces and cities have successively introduced a series of relevant policies to encourage property management to join community-based home care services, support property service enterprises in carrying out community-based home care services, and create a new model of community-based home care services, “property management + elderly care”.

2. Negative Population Growth and “Property + Elderly Care”

2.1. Negative population growth

Since the first national census in China in 1953, China has gradually begun to publicize and promote birth control, population size control and population quality improvement. The family planning policy of “late birth, fewer births and better births” has indeed achieved remarkable results. China’s population growth has been effectively controlled, which also led China to enter an aging society as early as 1999. However, at that time, the call for increasing the population growth was not significant, almost non-existent. The state has not adjusted its family planning policy as a result and still implements the family planning policy of “birth control”. Against this social backdrop, the degree of aging in China has continued to deteriorate and become increasingly severe. In 2011, the number of elderly people in China had reached 185 million, accounting for 13.7% of the total population of China. It was not until 2015 that China’s family planning policy was adjusted and the policy of allowing couples where one partner is an only child to have a second child was implemented. However, since its promulgation, this policy has not achieved much, and not many couples have responded to the policy by having a second child. Data from the seventh national census of China shows that the number of elderly people in China reached 264 million in 2020, accounting for 18.7% of the country’s total population, far exceeding 10%. This indicates that China has entered the ranks of countries with severe aging problems [1]. In 2021, China fully relaxed the “three-child” policy. At the beginning of 2023, a news headline - China’s population decreased by 850,000 at the end of 2022 compared to the end of the previous year, marking the first negative population growth in nearly 61 years - sparked a wave of discussions in China. The birth rate for the whole of 2022 was 6.77%. The population mortality rate is 7.37%. The natural population growth rate is -0.60%.

2.2. Property + elderly care

In 2005, Shanghai first proposed the concept of “9073”, which is actually composed of three numbers with special meanings: “90”, “7” and “3”. They respectively refer to 90% of the elderly being cared for at home, 7% relying on community care, and 3% choosing institutional care. This is also the way most elderly people in China enjoy their old age nowadays. At present, in China, a multi-level elderly care security system based on home-based care, supported by institutions and supplemented by them has been basically established. However, the existing community-based home care services for the elderly cannot meet the growing needs of the elderly in their later years, and there is a considerable gap. Community-based home care for the elderly

has deficiencies in terms of service supply capacity, coverage, diversity, supply-demand matching, and other aspects. Moreover, in terms of sustainability, community-based elderly care also faces very severe challenges [2]. Therefore, it is extremely urgent to innovate in community-based home care for the elderly. The innovation of property management companies' participation in community-based home care for the elderly might bring about a new and promising future for community-based home care. As early as 2013, The State Council issued the "Several Opinions on Accelerating the Development of the Elderly Care Service Industry". The "Opinions on Promoting the Development of Elderly Care Services" issued by The General Office of the State Council in 2019 first mentioned the relationship between property management and elderly care services. The implementation of the "property service + elderly care service" community-based home care model was officially proposed in the "Opinions on Promoting the Development of Home and Community Elderly Care Services by Property Service Enterprises" issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and other departments in 2020. Meanwhile, various provinces and cities in the local area have also successively introduced relevant policies on the "property + elderly care" model. In 2020, The "Implementation Plan for Accelerating the Development of Elderly Care Services" released by Beijing has proposed exploring the implementation of "property services + elderly care services". Meanwhile, Shanghai, as an important financial center in China, has also introduced relevant policies. The "Implementation Plan for Promoting High-Quality Development of Elderly Care and Childcare Services in Shanghai" supports property enterprises in participating in community-based home elderly care services. Explore the "community industry + elderly care services" model. Suzhou's "Action Plan on Deepening Community Governance to Empower Property Management Enterprises to Assist Elderly Care Services" has launched the "Community + Property Management + Elderly Care" action plan and carried out pilot work on property management providing community elderly care services.

3. The Significance of Promoting the "Property + Elderly Care" Model

With the continuous deepening of population aging, the drawbacks of China's community-based home care model have also been exposed one after another, namely, insufficient supply capacity, low supply level and low supply efficiency of community-based home care. In this case, there are several benefits to introducing property management into community-based home care for the elderly.

First, draw inspiration from welfare pluralism. Welfare pluralism can be simply understood as the diversity of welfare providers. In the past community-based home care for the elderly, the main providers of elderly care services were municipal governments. Due to excessive pressure, the government could offer very limited welfare to the elderly. Welfare pluralism provides a theoretical paradigm worth learning from for promoting the development of elderly care services in China: encouraging appropriate social organizations to undertake government-outsourced elderly care services, improving the rational allocation and utilization efficiency of resources, and making up for "government failure" [3].

Second, from pure public welfare logic to the introduction of commercial logic. At present, community-based home care for the elderly is basically handled by the government and is purely of a public welfare nature. Market mechanisms are rarely utilized, which leads to many drawbacks in community-based home care for the

elderly. Introducing property management into community-based home care for the elderly can change the purely public welfare nature of community-based home care for the elderly, be beneficial to the allocation of resources, and inject vitality into the field of community-based home care for the elderly.

Third, the unique advantages of property management enterprises. Compared with other social enterprises, property management has a unique geographical advantage in participating in community-based home care for the elderly. As the property management has long been responsible for the “Four Guarantees and One service” work in the community, they are well aware of the geographical environment such as the elderly-friendly facilities in the community. Meanwhile, the property management has been dealing with the residents of the community for a long time and is very familiar with the situation of the elderly in the community and their families. Therefore, property management companies have a natural advantage in participating in community-based home care for the elderly.

4. Pilot Projects of the “Property Management + Elderly Care” Model

As a practical innovation of community-based home care for the elderly, “property management + elderly care” has not yet achieved a scale effect across China. It has only been attempted in regions such as Beijing and Henan.

Daishu Hutong in Guancheng Hui District, Zhengzhou City, is exploring a new model and solution - “property management” crossing over into “elderly care”, that is, a new community-based home elderly care model of “property management + elderly care”. Daishu Hutong is a typical old residential area, covering an area of 0.27 square kilometers and having a population of over 6,000. Among them, there are over 2,200 elderly people aged 60 and above, accounting for one third of the total population of the community. Young people in the community are more willing to seek a better living environment and mostly leave home to work outside, while the elderly prefer familiar living Spaces and basically stay in the community. After venturing into the elderly care business, the property management company built a day care center in the community - Shuxinyuan. Shuxin Garden has three floors. The first floor is a medical clinic. Some services in the clinic are free for the elderly in the community, such as massage and medical consultation. In addition, the medical clinic also holds some health classes every month to popularize and promote some practical health preservation knowledge to the elderly. The second and third floors offer free access to the elderly, including a chess and card room, a gym and a massage room. However, the three-story Shuxin Garden is clearly too small for a community of over two thousand elderly people, and many of its functional facilities are incomplete. Meanwhile, the elderly care services provided by property management companies are relatively lacking in professionalism and the service items are rather limited. In addition, the person in charge of the property management company stated that the difficulty in making profits is an important issue currently faced by “property management” when venturing into “elderly care”.

There are currently over 3,600 households in Community A, B Sub-district, Chaoyang District, Beijing. Among them, the elderly account for 40% of the total population of the community. Therefore, the demand for elderly care services in this community is very large. In 2020, the property management company of Community A established an elderly care service project department, leveraging its advantages of

being deeply rooted in the community and responding quickly to create an elderly care home without walls, ensuring the daily living needs of the elderly [4]. The property management company has implemented a “consular” system for each building and household by appointing a “consular” for elderly care. The “consuls” visited the elderly who are advanced in age, living alone or disabled in Community A to understand the specific needs of home-based elderly care services in Community A. Based on the information obtained by the elderly care “consuls” during their visits to the community, the property management company has formulated A list of home-based elderly care services for Community A and determined the charging standards for each service. For demands not on the service list, the corresponding “consul” will contact a third-party institution to provide services to the elderly in the community. In addition, property management companies often recruit volunteers to hold some lectures and assistance activities for the elderly nearby in the community. For instance, in response to the issue that most elderly people are not familiar with using smart phones, the property elderly care service project department has launched activities to assist, love and respect the elderly through technology, recruiting community volunteers to teach the elderly how to take photos and shop online with smart phones. In response to the health and wellness issues that every elderly person is concerned about, the property elderly care service project department invites experts or doctors to enter the community and popularize simple and practical health knowledge among the elderly in the community.

5. Problems Existing in the “Property Management + Elderly Care” Model

5.1. There is a shortage of professional talents and insufficient professional capabilities

For a long time, most property management companies have been engaged in routine work, responsible for the security, maintenance management, environmental management, etc. of the community, and carrying out some "trivial labor". Elderly care services, as a highly specialized service, carry certain risks and have high requirements for professionalization and refinement. The entry threshold is relatively high, and the personnel providing the service must have certain qualifications or at least possess high quality. This is quite different from the conventional service items originally provided by property service enterprises. Therefore, after the property management company ventured into the elderly care sector, its original staff did not possess professional expertise in elderly care, which is specifically manifested in the following two aspects. First, the requirements for property management companies to recruit grassroots employees are not high. Most of the grassroots employees have not obtained a bachelor's degree, and their overall labor quality is relatively low. Secondly, the grassroots employees of property management companies have not received training in elderly care services and have not obtained qualification certificates in the elderly care field. Their professionalism needs to be examined.

5.2. The image barriers of traditional property management enterprises

The unfriendly relationship between the property management company and the residents of the community has hindered its participation in the development of community-based home care for the elderly. The regular work content of property management companies is to do some trivial labor for the residents of the community.

In the public's mind, this has always been regarded as low-end labor. In this situation, if property management companies cross over into the elderly care sector with public welfare nature, it will help establish a positive image for the property management companies and win the recognition and trust of the owners and society. However, the majority of the public holds a wait-and-see and skeptical attitude towards property management companies venturing into the elderly care sector. In the process of their practice in the community and home-based elderly care field, property management companies are confronted with the problem of public recognition barriers. First of all, many property management companies have long held grudges against the residents of their communities, and the continuous emergence of conflicts has led to a negative image of the property management companies. In recent years, the process of urbanization has been continuously advancing. Some farmlands and houses have been transformed into high-rise buildings, and urban property services have also expanded accordingly. However, there are still deficiencies in property management, such as unstandardized property services, opaque charges, and low personnel quality. As a result, the residents of the community have a relatively low satisfaction with the property management and may deliberately delay paying the property management fees, leading to a vicious cycle. Even in some communities, the relationship between the owners and the property management companies has deteriorated and conflicts have occurred, which has led some residents in urban communities to explore “de-property management” and manage their communities through self-governance [5].

5.3. The supply of elderly care services is limited and the service level is not high

The limited supply of elderly care services by property management and the low level of service are mainly reflected in the following three aspects. First, the supply of basic supporting facilities for community elderly care services is insufficient. Although many residential communities are currently being built with the consideration of the service needs of the elderly and advocate for community construction that is elderly-friendly. However, at present, the construction of elderly care service supporting facilities in most communities is not complete, and the adaptation for the elderly is insufficient. Especially in old residential areas, there is a serious lack of relevant supporting infrastructure. Secondly, property management companies have almost no free space to implement in the community, which leads to conflicts between the property management and the owners regarding the utilization of public resources in the community. The residents in the community are not all elderly people; there are also a considerable number of young people. Therefore, when the property management attempts to use the idle land in the community for elderly care, conflicts arise due to considerations of their own interests. Thirdly, the property management has made insufficient investment in the elderly care business, and the service items are still relatively limited. Due to a lack of funds, property management companies invest relatively little when participating in community-based home care for the elderly as service-oriented enterprises. Most property management companies are still in the shallow trial zone. Furthermore, as property management companies have not been involved in the elderly care sector for long, their understanding and awareness of elderly care services are still relatively lacking. As a result, the types of elderly care services they provide are limited to some simple ones, such as catering, entertainment, physical examinations and other superficial elderly care services. They do not pay enough attention to the spiritual needs of the elderly. It cannot meet the diverse elderly care service demands of the elderly in the community [6].

6. Countermeasures for the Problems of the “Property + Elderly Care” Model

6.1. Make up for the talent gap and cultivate professional talents

In today's society, competition ultimately boils down to a competition for talent. Whether property management companies can succeed in venturing into the elderly care sector is closely related to professional elderly care service personnel. Therefore, property management enterprises must attach great importance to the current shortage of professional talents and take immediate action to promote the construction of a professional talent system in the field of elderly care services. The property management can adopt a “three-step” strategy to promote the construction of a professional talent system for elderly care services, that is, to advance it respectively from the short-term, medium-term and long-term dimensions. From a short-term perspective, in order to address the urgent predicament of property management companies lacking elderly care service talents, property management companies can choose to cooperate with third-party institutions to quickly obtain professional elderly care service talents. That is, property management can cooperate with professional elderly care institutions to obtain talent support. In addition, property management enterprises can choose to strengthen cooperation with medical institutions, catering companies and home service companies to comprehensively make up for the shortage of professional talents. The second step, from a medium-term perspective, is that property management companies should provide relevant training and selection for the existing property elderly care staff. Meanwhile, property management companies can recruit a group of professionals with professional qualification certificates such as psychological counseling, health management, and health care. From a long-term perspective, the third step is also for sustainability considerations. Property management companies should regularly provide relevant training for the current employees responsible for elderly care services, improve the talent cultivation and further education system, adhere to the principle that learning is an ongoing process, and always pay attention to the growth of talents.

6.2. Fulfill social responsibilities and reshape the image

Image serves as a window for an enterprise to showcase itself to the outside world. A good corporate image helps enhance market recognition and increase market competitiveness. Conversely, if a company has a poor external image, it will restrict its development. At present, in order to promote the development of property management in the elderly care field, property management enterprises must change their image and restore their reputation. First, property management enterprises should improve their internal rules and regulations and standardize management. Property management often has conflicts with the residents of the community over issues such as the collection of property management fees. Ultimately, the root cause of these conflicts lies in the non-standard internal management of the property management company. Therefore. The property management must enhance its management, standardize the employee code of conduct, and prevent future conflicts with the property owners. In addition, regarding the previous conflicts, the property management company should maintain a positive and friendly attitude, take the initiative to mediate with the owners, and strive to turn hostility into harmony as much as possible. Secondly, as a profit-making organization, property management should pursue economic benefits while also taking into account social responsibilities. The

elderly care service industry is not entirely commercial; to a large extent, it has a public welfare nature. The property management can provide some public welfare elderly care services. At the same time, value-added elderly care services should be carried out to meet the demands of some elderly people with purchasing power for high-level and high-quality home and community elderly care services. Third, enhance professional standards. The business scope of traditional property management mainly includes security, cleaning and other affairs, which has also led to the public's stereotypical impression of property management: low-end and trivial. The foray of property management into the elderly care sector has exceeded public perception. To gain public trust, property management must enhance the professional level of elderly care services and change public perception.

6.3. Increase capital investment and explore diversified value-added services

For property management companies venturing into the elderly care sector, capital is the first step. At present, due to a lack of funds, property management enterprises have very limited investment in the elderly care service industry and the level of elderly care services they provide is also relatively low. Based on this property, it can cooperate with the government, introduce third-party social capital into the elderly care field, increase capital investment, so as to carry out diversified value-added elderly care services and further promote the development of elderly care services. To promote property-based elderly care from the shallow water area to the deep water area and explore diversified value-added services, the following aspects can be approached. First, precise positioning and class division services. Segment the elderly groups, pay attention to the needs of different elderly groups, and provide targeted services to the elderly. Specifically, for younger elderly people with stronger self-care abilities, only simple care services need to be provided, with a focus on their spiritual needs. For this group of elderly people, the property management can organize activities based on their interests and hobbies. For instance, they can set up smart classrooms to teach the elderly how to take photos, chat and shop online with their mobile phones, and hold a “Sunset Red” square dance competition, etc. For elderly people with weak self-care abilities, as well as those who are disabled or have dementia, special attention should be paid to their care services and medical services. Second, promote the intelligence and digitalization of elderly care services. In today's world, which is a world of technology, property management companies can integrate artificial intelligence into elderly care services, create smart communities suitable for the elderly, and provide more scientific, convenient and healthy services for the elderly.

7. Conclusions

Given the current aging population situation in China, traditional home-based and institutional elderly care can no longer fully meet the huge elderly care demand market in China. Allowing property management companies to enter the community for home-based elderly care has great theoretical and practical significance for solving China's elderly care problems. The promotion of “property management + elderly care” mainly has three advantages. First, make up for the “government failure” with welfare pluralism, introduce property management to undertake elderly care services, and improve the efficiency of resource allocation; Second, break the pure logic of public welfare, inject commercial vitality, and improve the shortcomings of community elderly care supply. Third, rely on the geographical advantages of the

property to reduce the cost of service connection. However, the current “property management + elderly care” model also has three bottlenecks. Firstly, the educational attainment of property management staff is relatively low and they lack training in elderly care qualifications, resulting in a shortage of professional talents. Secondly, due to non-standard management, the property management has deep grievances with the owners and is facing obstacles in image recognition. Thirdly, insufficient capital investment leads to incomplete service facilities and a single project, making it difficult to meet diversified demands. In this regard, property management enterprises should make up for the talent gap and cultivate professionals. Fulfill social responsibilities and reshape the image; Increase capital investment and explore diversified value-added services.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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