

Spiritual Support for the Rural Elderly in China

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Abstract: Due to the imbalance of urban and rural development, more and more young people in rural areas are flocking to cities for development. This not only intensifies the phenomenon of empty nesters in rural China, but also makes the old-age problems faced by rural elderly more prominent. Among them, in the aspect of old-age care, the spiritual old-age care of the rural elderly has also attracted more and more academic attention. This paper summarizes the current research on the connotation of spiritual pension, the predicament of spiritual pension for the rural elderly, the causes of spiritual pension and the corresponding countermeasures, in order to provide some theoretical references for the future research on spiritual pension for the rural elderly.

Keywords: Rural Elderly; Spiritual Elderly Care; Support; Overview; China

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the basic material life of the rural elderly can be guaranteed, but their spiritual life is relatively scarce, and the spiritual old-age care problem is more prominent, which has attracted extensive attention from many domestic scholars.

2. Research on the Connotation of Spiritual Old-Age Care

With the rapid development of China's economy, the basic material needs of the elderly can be met, after these material needs are met, their spiritual needs become increasingly prominent. At present, the academic circles from different research perspectives on the problem of spiritual care for the elderly, the study of its connotation is also relatively rich. Zhang and Xing believe that spiritual and material old-age care are complementary and indispensable for the elderly. They pointed out that spiritual old-age care is a specific way of behavior, which

mainly involves the government, the community, the neighborhood, the children and the elderly themselves. At the same time, they believe that spiritual old-age care is actually a relationship model established between different subjects, and different subjects play different roles in the process of spiritual old-age care [1]. Zhang pointed out from the perspective of multi-subject collaborative governance that spiritual elderly care is a mode of elderly care service, in which elderly care service providers provide relevant services to service audiences through institutionalized and non-institutionalized means or ways to meet their spiritual needs [2]. Zhang and Wang propose from the perspective of social capital that spiritual old-age care is to stimulate and meet the spiritual needs of the elderly with the joint support of family, government and other parties, so as to make the elderly have a good mental health state and improve their satisfaction with life [3]. Sa proposed that spiritual care for the elderly is to provide spiritual and cultural services to the elderly while ensuring their daily care under the cooperation of multiple subjects led by the government, so as to enable the elderly to gain a sense of belonging and identity [4]. Zhang and Qin proposed from the background of Chinese modernization that spiritual old-age care is to meet the needs of the elderly at a higher level under the premise of ensuring their material life, so as to realize their spiritual sublimation. They also divided the spiritual needs of the elderly into spiritual sublimation, emotional needs, self-worth, self-belonging and other aspects [5]. Liu and Liu believe that spiritual old-age care is the advanced stage of old-age care for the elderly, which means that individuals, groups or organizations take certain ways and methods to provide spiritual and psychological comfort and comfort for the elderly, help them realize their own value, and then eliminate their inner loneliness, so that they can obtain real spiritual satisfaction [6]. Wang and He believe that

spiritual care for the elderly is to pay attention to the emotional, psychological and other needs of the elderly on the premise of meeting the economic and material needs of the elderly, so as to ultimately enable the elderly to obtain spiritual satisfaction and pleasure. They further pointed out that the spiritual support of the elderly includes three dimensions: personality respect, achievement peace of mind and emotional comfort [7]. From the above studies, the current academic circles have different interpretations of the connotation of spiritual old-age care, but they have reached a consensus on the subject of spiritual old-age care, all of which are explaining the importance of meeting the spiritual or emotional needs of the elderly as a behavioral subject and other behavioral subjects for spiritual old-age care.

3. Research on the Dilemma of Spiritual Support for the Elderly in Rural Areas

In terms of its predicament, the academic circle has more and more research on the predicament of spiritual support for the rural elderly, and the academic circle has analyzed the predicament of spiritual support for the rural elderly from different perspectives.

Shen and Zhang believe that family factors play an important role in providing spiritual support for the elderly in rural areas. However, due to the limited contact between their children and the elderly due to their migrant workers, and the elderly have almost all their spiritual sustains on their children, such a contradiction weakens the support of family spiritual support for the elderly [8]. Sa also believes that children working in cities, even if they often make phone calls, can not alleviate the loneliness of the elderly [5]. Xing pointed out that due to the limitation of educational level, the elderly are psychologically empty and their spiritual and cultural life is monotonous [9].

Kang and Luo believe that the basic service facilities of rural communities are backward, spiritual and cultural activities are few, and professional social organization services are lacking [10]. Zhang also believes that the current development of social organizations is not mature, and the participation of volunteers and social workers in rural areas is insufficient [3]. Shao and Yu also believe that although China has determined a government-led and

coordinated spiritual service system, there are still problems in terms of insufficient investment in rural old-age security [11].

Different studies on the above dilemmas are based on scholars' analysis from different perspectives or the influence of different actors on the spiritual support of the rural elderly. In general, a comprehensive and complete analysis of China's rural elderly facing the current spiritual pension dilemma.

4. Research on the Causes of the Dilemma of Spiritual Support for the Elderly in Rural Areas

At present, most of the studies on the causes of spiritual support difficulties of the rural elderly in the academic circle do not study a single factor, but study many factors, which are mainly from the perspectives of individuals, families, society and government.

4.1 Individual Perspective

Zhao pointed out that due to the negative cognition of the elderly, they lack a clear understanding of their spiritual needs, and most of them hold a negative attitude toward life, which further aggravates their difficulties in spiritual old-age care [12]. This is consistent with the view of scholar. Wu et al. analyzed the causes of spiritual pension difficulties for rural elderly from the perspective of social capital. At the individual level, the first is due to the low cultural level of the elderly, their own relationship network is limited; Second, the physical function of the elderly is declining, and the communication is decreasing, which reduces the spiritual comfort of the outside world; Third, the lack of self-efficacy causes the elderly to feel powerless, thus aggravating their psychological pressure; Fourth, the individual social capital stock of the elderly is reduced due to the utilitarianism of interpersonal communication [13].

4.2 Family Perspective

Zhang and Qin specifically analyzed the causes of the dilemma of spiritual support for the elderly in rural areas under the background of Chinese modernization. They pointed out that the current rapid economic development has changed the traditional family structure in rural areas, the modern lifestyle has had a certain impact on the traditional concept of filial piety, and the changes in social structure

have weakened the family's support for spiritual support [5]. Shen and Zhang pointed out that the family status of the elderly in rural areas is proportional to their economic income, but due to the growth of the elderly's age and the decline of their labor ability, their status in the family gradually declines [8]. From the perspective of social capital, Wu et al. pointed out that the imbalance of urban-rural dual structure leads to the decentralization of family social capital, which further leads to the deepening of spiritual pension difficulties for rural elderly [13].

4.3 Community Perspective

Zhang and Wang based on the specific investigation and analysis of the data, concluded that the community can make up for the lack of spiritual self-cultivation awareness to a certain extent. However, at present, there are some problems in the community, such as low participation in spiritual pension for the elderly, inadequate construction of community culture, and failure of community organizations to fully recognize the importance of spiritual pension and provide corresponding spiritual pension services, which aggravate the dilemma of spiritual pension for the elderly in rural areas [14]. From the perspective of social ecosystem, Shao and Yu pointed out that due to the lack of relevant organizations in village communities, the lack of corresponding facilities for the elderly, and the lack of attention paid by managers to the needs of the elderly's spiritual pension, the plight of the elderly in rural areas has been aggravated [11]. From the perspective of social capital, Wu et al. pointed out that due to the limitation of the scope of the community, the social network of the elderly is limited to acquaintances, and it is difficult to obtain the social capital generated by the limited relationship network. Moreover, the channels of communication between rural areas and the outside world are relatively simple, and the stock of social capital that can be mobilized is also very limited [13].

4.4 Government Perspective

Shao and Yu believe that the government fails to play a leading role in the process of spiritual support for rural elderly, and does not have a clear understanding of its own responsibilities and positioning [11]. Zhang and Qin, starting

from the background of Chinese-style modernization, believe that due to the complex administrative affairs of grass-roots governments, they cannot independently do a good job of spiritual elderly care, and village committees fail to actively assume social responsibilities, resulting in the absence of social participation [5].

The above scholars' research and analysis on the causes of the difficulties of spiritual old-age care for rural elderly provide a basis and research ideas for the subsequent development of spiritual old-age care for rural elderly. First of all, we should pay attention to the elderly themselves as the main body of spiritual pension, and the state of all aspects of the elderly themselves is crucial to their spiritual pension. Secondly, we should pay attention to the role of the family. In the intergenerational relationship that continues on the basis of blood, the family has an irreplaceable role in the spiritual support of the elderly. Moreover, it is necessary to see the role of the community or village committee in providing spiritual support for the elderly, and attach importance to the importance of social communication for the elderly. In addition, we should pay attention to the leading role of the government in the spiritual care of the elderly. Finally, the development and improvement of spiritual support for the elderly in rural areas depend on the mutual cooperation and joint efforts of multiple subjects.

5. Research on the Dilemma of Spiritual Support for the Elderly in Rural Areas

At present, scholars have put forward corresponding countermeasures on the basis of specific analysis and research on the plight of rural elderly spiritual support.

5.1 Individual Perspective

Shao and Yu proposed from the perspective of social ecosystem that the elderly should cultivate self-regulation awareness, strengthen their adaptability, and overcome negative emotions with a healthy attitude [11]. Zhang and Xing, based on the specific analysis of the problems of providing for the elderly in rural areas, propose that the elderly themselves should reduce their dependence on their children, reduce their expectation of return to their children, shift more attention to themselves, and face up to their own value [1].

5.2 Family Perspective

Liu and Liu pointed out that family members should earnestly fulfill their obligation to support the elderly, internalize spiritual care in the heart and externalize it in the practice. Children should change the idea of "heavy weight light spirit", not only pay attention to the material needs of the elderly, but also pay attention to the spiritual needs of the elderly, and carry out more common family activities with the elderly [7]. This is basically consistent with the views of scholars Zhang and Wang. Zhang and Xing suggest that children should "visit home often" to develop a good habit of caring for their parents emotionally and intellectually [1].

5.3 Social Perspective Social Perspective

Liu and Liu believe that the community should give full play to the role of the grassroots, and attract people's attention to the spiritual support of the elderly by arranging special personnel to provide spiritual comfort and help to the elderly, carrying out more recreational activities such as singing opera, and putting up posters about "filial piety" [6]. Xing, from the perspective of active aging, advocates increasing investment in elderly care services, establishing specialized psychological counseling centers for the elderly, and encouraging the elderly to actively participate in society [9]. Wu et al. proposed to lower the registration threshold of social groups and establish various social organizations to enhance the participation of villagers. And by combining the "elite power" of the community, to improve the social influence of the community [13].

5.4 Government Perspective

After regression analysis of specific data, Liu and Liu pointed out that the government, as the promoter and supporter of the construction of social networks, should communicate more with the elderly and promote the elderly to "go to the countryside and households". And through the improvement of the existing laws and regulations for the elderly, to protect the elderly related services. In addition, they also advocate the creation of a rural elderly care ecosystem, coordinate resources of all parties, and strive to build a social network platform for smart elderly care. At the same time, they

also noted the role of the media in the process of spiritual care for the elderly in rural areas, advocating that the media should build a psychological service platform, spread positive values for the elderly, and innovate publicity forms [7]. Yang et al. believe that the government should play a leading role and organize more social work teams to enter villages, so that the elderly can obtain spiritual comfort through various activities [15].

5.5 Other Angles

Zhang and Qin advocated strengthening the construction of local publicity, popularizing the concept of mutual support for the elderly in rural areas, and promoting the realization of physical and mental "co-support" for the elderly. In addition, they proposed to innovate the "mutual support" operation mechanism and explore a new model of combining government-led administrative organs with spontaneous organizations [5]. Zhang advocates the privatization of rural public services according to local conditions, and strives to involve more social organizations in the spiritual process of providing for the elderly in rural areas [2].

To sum up, the existing domestic studies have put forward corresponding countermeasures on the basis of specific analysis of the plight and causes of spiritual old-age support for the rural elderly, which is helpful to alleviate and improve the plight of spiritual old-age support for the rural elderly. However, there are still some difficulties in the concrete practice of these countermeasures, such as the mutual cooperation of multiple subjects, and the improvement of the elderly's own old-age care awareness and behavior.

6. Research Deficiencies and Research Prospects

6.1 Under Research

From the above literature, the academic community is very concerned about the spiritual care of the rural elderly, and the research results are also very rich. Based on different research perspectives and discipline theories, scholars have carried out in-depth discussions on the predicament, causes of the dilemma and corresponding countermeasures for the spiritual support of the rural elderly, which provides reference and reference for

further in-depth research on the spiritual support of the rural elderly, but there are certain deficiencies.

First, the sample size and representativeness are insufficient. In the existing studies, the sample size of the research on spiritual care for the rural elderly is often small, and most of them are concentrated in the master's thesis, which is difficult to reflect the overall situation of the rural elderly. And most of the studies only focus on specific regions, lacking nationwide comparison and analysis.

Second, the research perspective is relatively simple. Nowadays, most scholars are more inclined to discuss the mental health or emotional support of the elderly in rural areas, and fail to conduct comprehensive analysis and research from the current economic development, historical and cultural background, social communication and other aspects.

Thirdly, the role of professional organizations and professionals is ignored. Current academic research mainly focuses on how to better play the role of the elderly themselves, family members, communities and the government, but less attention is paid to the role of relevant professional organizations and professionals in providing for the elderly in rural areas. Although social worker stations have been mentioned in many studies, in most rural areas of our country, there are no social worker stations or other organizations that specialize in mental care services for the elderly. Moreover, most studies have neglected the importance of professionals in the field of psychological counseling and social work to the spiritual care of the rural elderly.

6.2 Research Prospect

First, interdisciplinary research should be strengthened. The spiritual support problem faced by the rural elderly is not only the research field of sociology, but also closely related to many disciplines such as law and economics. Therefore, in order to have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the problem of spiritual care for the elderly in rural areas, it is necessary to conduct in-depth research from the perspective of multiple disciplines.

Second, the coverage of research should be expanded. In view of the imbalance of China's current economic development, it is necessary

to pay more attention to the spiritual support of rural elderly people in different regions and different economic conditions in specific research, especially those elderly groups living in remote areas that are easy to be ignored. In addition, it can also ensure the diversity and representativeness of research samples through diversified data collection channels, and improve the scientific nature of theoretical research through specific analysis of these data, so as to put forward targeted countermeasures more effectively.

Thirdly, relevant professional organizations and professionals should be cultivated. Establish social work stations or organizations related to rural elderly care services, and train the staff of these institutions in order to improve their professional skills and service quality. At the same time, universities and research institutions are encouraged to add research projects and courses specifically aimed at the field of spiritual care for the elderly in rural areas, so as to train more professionals with relevant knowledge.

At present, the research on spiritual support for the elderly in rural areas has important social and practical significance. There is still a long way to go in order to change the current plight of the rural elderly and solve their current spiritual pension problems, which requires the joint efforts of multiple subjects and concerted efforts.

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