

Application and Comparative Study of Self-Interest Altruism and Helping Others to Help Themselves in Social Work

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Abstract: As an applied social science, the core of the social work profession lies in helping individuals, families, and communities solve problems and enhance their social functions through professional concepts, methods, and techniques. In the practice of social work, both the concepts of self-interest altruism and helping others to help themselves play important roles. This article elaborates on the connotations and theoretical foundations of self-interest altruism and helping others to help themselves, conducts an in-depth study and comparative analysis of the application of these two concepts in the social work profession, and proposes how to better combine these two concepts to promote the common progress of individuals and society.

Keywords: Self-interest Altruism; Helping Others to Help Themselves; Social Work; Comparative Study

1. Introduction

Since its inception, the social work profession has been committed to improving the living conditions of vulnerable groups and enhancing the overall well-being of society through professional services. In this process, the concepts of self-interest altruism and helping others to help themselves have had a profound impact on social work. Self-interest altruism emphasizes the realization of self-value while helping others; whereas helping others to help themselves focuses more on stimulating the inner strength of service recipients and assisting them in achieving self-growth and independence ^[1]. This article will delve into the application of these two concepts in social work from both theoretical and practical perspectives, and conduct a comparative analysis.

2. Analysis of the Concept of Self-Benefit

and Other-Benefit

"Self-benefit and other-benefit" signifies benefiting oneself while simultaneously benefiting others. This concept embodies compassion and wisdom, emphasizing that individuals should not only focus on their own growth and liberation but also on the well-being of others during the process of self-cultivation and self-improvement, achieving self-elevation through helping others.

The "li" in "zili lita" (self-benefit and benefit-others) means "benefit" or "advantage," abbreviated as "li" or "yi." Master Yinshun once pointed out that "li" refers to "interests" and "happiness," meaning "to be free from falsity, ugliness, poverty, and suffering, and to attain truth, goodness, abundance, and peace." "Zili" (self-benefit) and "lita" (benefit-others) refer to "obtaining such benefits and happiness for oneself or others." Therefore, the "self-benefit" mentioned in "zili lita" generally does not refer to self-interested behaviors such as the enjoyment of material goods outside oneself, but rather is discussed in terms of enlightenment, liberation, and personal cultivation. The "benefit-others" in "zili lita" is also specifically referred to as "interests," which are divided into material and spiritual aspects. Material "benefit-others" includes outer and inner material giving: "such as providing clothing and food to those in poverty, offering medical treatment to the sick, repairing roads, creating gardens, and using one's own physical strength or life to assist and save others." Spiritual "benefit-others" includes the giving of Dharma and the giving of fearlessness: "such as imparting knowledge to the ignorant, providing comfort to the distressed, and encouraging the timid; through all cultural endeavors, uplifting people's hearts towards positivity, light, the middle way, normality, and peace"; "not only guiding them with transcendental teachings but also with secular righteousness, cultivating a sound

personality in humanity ^[2]." From a moral and ethical perspective, zili lita embodies a noble moral quality, which not only focuses on one's own interests but also actively considers others and strives to enhance the overall well-being of society.

In terms of theoretical foundation, self-benefit and other-benefit integrate the "benevolence" idea from Eastern traditional philosophy with the win-win concept of modern Western society. It encourages individuals to actively pay attention to the needs and interests of others while pursuing personal goals, achieving common development goals through cooperation and sharing. This concept helps to build harmonious social relationships and promotes social stability and prosperity.

3. Analysis of the Concept of "Help Others to Help Themselves"

The concept of "help others to help themselves" originates from the practice of social work, referring to the idea of achieving self-growth and improvement through helping others. The core of this concept lies in viewing helping others as a process of self-realization, rather than just a one-way act of giving. The concept of "help others to help themselves" has a significant impact on social work ^[3]. Some scholars regard it as the core concept of social work, pointing out that "'help others to help themselves' is the core service concept of social work and the key to its existence. Since its inception, social work has adhered to this service concept ^[4]." Some scholars refer to it as the core value of social work and note that "a complete understanding of social work's 'help others to help themselves' should profoundly grasp the essence of social work from the perspective of self-help capacity building," and that "help others to help themselves" embodies "the essence of social work ^[5,6]." In social work, "help others to help themselves" is seen as an important working principle and method. It emphasizes that in the process of helping clients solve problems, their autonomy and initiative should also be stimulated so that they can gradually overcome difficulties and achieve self-growth.

The concept of "help others to help themselves" has emerged in China for a long time, but in the early stages, it was only fragmented and non-systematic. With the changes in modern Chinese society and the

introduction of Western ideas, the charitable concept of "help others to help themselves" began to gradually develop. The promotion and practice of this concept are of great significance for enhancing individual capabilities and promoting social harmony.

4. The Practice and Application of Self-Interest Altruism and Help Others to Help Themselves in Social Work

4.1 The Application and Embodiment of the Concept of Self-Interest Altruism in Social Work Practice

Applying the principle of self-interest altruism in social work not only contributes to the personal growth and professional development of social workers but also effectively enhances the quality of life and happiness of the recipients. By continuously improving self-cultivation, establishing mutual trust relationships, advocating social fairness and justice, and realizing self-value while assisting others in their growth, social workers can truly practice the concept of self-interest altruism and contribute their own strength to the harmony and progress of society. The specific manifestations and applications are as follows:

4.1.1 Enhancing self-cultivation and professional competence

Self-interest: Social workers should first commit to enhancing their professional knowledge and skills, which is not only to better serve the recipients but also an investment in their own career development. Through continuous learning and practice, social workers can more effectively address the issues faced by recipients.

Altruism: With improved professional competence, social workers can more accurately identify the needs of recipients and provide more precise and efficient assistance, thereby truly achieving the goal of altruism.

4.1.2 Establishing mutual trust relationships

Self-interest: By establishing sincere and trusting relationships with recipients, social workers can not only enhance their communication skills and interpersonal abilities but also gain more satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment in their work.

Altruism: The establishment of mutual trust relationships helps recipients to more openly share their problems and needs, thereby facilitating social workers to provide more

practical and personalized assistance plans.

4.1.3 Advocating for social fairness and justice Self-interest

In the process of advocating for social fairness and justice, social workers can deepen their understanding of social issues and enhance their sense of social responsibility and mission. Altruism: By promoting fairness and justice in policy improvement, resource allocation, and other aspects, social workers can strive for more rights and opportunities for vulnerable groups and promote overall social harmony and development.

4.1.4 Realizing self-value while assisting others in their growth

Self-interest: In the process of helping others, social workers are also continuously exploring and realizing their own self-value. By solving social problems and improving the living conditions of others, social workers can obtain a great sense of professional achievement and personal satisfaction.

Altruism: While assisting recipients in solving problems, social workers can also help them discover their own potential and resources, encouraging them to independently solve problems and achieve self-growth. This assistance is not limited to material-level help but also includes spiritual-level support and encouragement.

4.2 Application and Embodiment of the Concept of "Help People Help Themselves" in Social Work Practice

The application and embodiment of the concept of "help people help themselves" in social work practice are mainly reflected in the following aspects:

4.2.1 Embodiment of principles

The fundamental principle of social work is "help people help themselves." This means that when social workers assist clients, they not only provide direct help by offering information, resources, and support but also enhance service recipients' abilities to make decisions and manage themselves. More importantly, it enhances their independence and autonomy so that they can independently solve similar problems in the future. This concept embodies respect and trust for service recipients, believing that everyone has the ability to grow and solve problems on their own.

4.2.2 Needs assessment and support

When practicing the concept of "help people help themselves," social workers first conduct a needs assessment, similar to the "estimation" in case services, to deeply understand and analyze the needs, issues, and difficulties of service recipients. Based on the assessment results, social workers provide corresponding support, such as providing material assistance to impoverished families, offering employment information and career planning guidance to unemployed youth, and providing psychological support to abused children. Through material, psychological, or informational support, they help service recipients address current specific difficulties.

4.2.3 Stimulating potential and capacity building

"Help people help themselves" aims to achieve "self-help" through "helping others," with the most important goal being to promote human capability enhancement ^[7]. In addition to providing direct support, social workers are also committed to stimulating the potential of service recipients. By discovering individual strengths, encouraging self-development, and cultivating a positive attitude, they encourage service recipients to recognize their abilities and value, and cultivate their awareness of actively seeking methods and pathways to solve problems. For example, encouraging youth to participate in vocational skills training and helping people with disabilities discover their own potential. Social workers assist service recipients in enhancing their self-help abilities. This includes providing training, coaching, and other capacity-building activities to enhance service recipients' self-awareness and problem-solving abilities. For example, providing rehabilitation training for people with disabilities to improve their self-care abilities; offering career planning guidance to unemployed youth to help them find suitable career development directions.

4.2.4 Advocating for rights and promoting social equity and justice

Social workers also pay attention to protecting the rights and interests of service recipients, advocating for equal rights, enhancing their self-awareness, and promoting social equity and justice to strive for more rights and interests for them. For example, providing legal aid to children who have suffered sexual abuse and advocating for barrier-free environments for people with disabilities.

4.2.5 Collaboration and coordination

Through multi-party collaboration, social workers integrate various social resources and actively cooperate and coordinate with volunteers, service recipients, and other social organizations to jointly provide more comprehensive and sustained support and assistance to service recipients. For example, organizing volunteers to provide companionship services to lonely elderly people; coordinating resources among different social organizations to provide more comprehensive support to vulnerable groups. This not only embodies the concept of "help people help themselves" but also contributes to building a fairer and more harmonious social environment.

5. Comparative Study of Self-Interest and Altruism Versus Helping Others to Help Themselves

5.1 Differences in Goal Orientation

Self-interest and altruism, as well as helping others to help themselves, exhibit significant differences in their goal orientations. Self-interest and altruism emphasize pursuing one's own interests while also considering the interests of others. This concept holds that individual success should not come at the expense of others, but rather through cooperation and sharing to achieve common prosperity for both individuals and society. Self-interest and altruism are more often seen as individual behaviors, where everyone can embody this concept through their daily actions. It encourages individuals to consider the impact on others while pursuing their own goals, fostering harmonious interpersonal relationships. On the other hand, helping others to help themselves focuses more on achieving self-value enhancement and personal growth through assisting others. This concept believes that by helping others solve problems, individuals not only gain inner satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment but also hone their abilities and wisdom. It is typically practiced by social workers on behalf of society as a form of institutionalized assistance, similar to the early English Poor Laws, which aimed to help individuals achieve self-sufficiency more quickly through systematic aid. Therefore, "helping others to help themselves" is not only a fundamental principle of social work but also

a guiding principle for formulating social work-related policies [8]. When practicing helping others to help themselves, social workers usually need to adhere to certain professional ethics and norms, aiming to provide professional services and methods to help those in need solve their problems, ensuring the effectiveness and fairness of the assistance.

5.2 Differences in Implementation Paths

In terms of implementation paths, the concept of self-interest and altruism primarily achieves common development between individuals and others through the core path of cooperation and sharing. It encourages individuals to not only focus on their own needs and interests but also actively consider the needs and interests of others when pursuing personal goals. This concept advocates a win-win or multi-win mindset, seeking solutions acceptable to both or multiple parties to achieve common development. In the implementation process, self-interest and altruism emphasize communication and negotiation, highlighting the establishment of good interpersonal relationships and cooperation mechanisms to promote resource sharing and complementary advantages, thereby achieving mutual progress between individuals and others. For example, the popular community love fund is established by residents to support vulnerable groups within the community or respond to emergencies. Through this cooperation and sharing, not only can it strengthen the connections and trust among community residents, but it can also collectively enhance the overall well-being and quality of life in the community.

In contrast, the concept of helping others to help themselves primarily enhances oneself through practical actions to help others solve problems, which is a compensated behavior based on professional social work. It emphasizes that in the process of helping others, individuals need to continuously challenge and surpass themselves, exercising their abilities and wisdom by solving the problems and difficulties faced by others. Taking volunteer teaching as an example, volunteers who go to remote areas or schools with scarce educational resources not only provide valuable educational resources and support to local students but also challenge and improve themselves through this process,

maximizing their personal value.

5.3 Different Impacts on Society

Self-interest and altruism, as well as helping others to help themselves, have different impacts on society. Self-interest and altruism contribute to building harmonious social relationships and promoting overall social progress and prosperity. It encourages individuals to consider the overall interests of society while pursuing their own interests, thereby achieving sustainable social development. The sustainability of this impact lies in the persistence of individuals and society. On the other hand, helping others to help themselves focuses more on an individual's role and responsibility in society. It emphasizes that individuals should actively participate in social welfare activities, help others solve problems through practical actions, and contribute their own strength to social progress. It places greater emphasis on cultivating the long-term self-development capabilities of recipients, enabling them to better cope with challenges in life in the future.

6. Mutual Promotion and Integration of Self-Interest and Altruism, and Helping Others While Helping Oneself

Although self-interest and altruism, and helping others while helping oneself differ in terms of goal orientation, implementation pathways, and social impact, they are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they can promote and integrate with each other, jointly driving the development of social workers and the social work profession.

Firstly, the concept of helping others while helping oneself can be integrated into the practice of self-interest and altruism. Both self-interest and altruism, as well as helping others while helping oneself, emphasize the close connection between individuals and society, and the impact of individual behavior on others and society. This commonality provides the basis for their integration. Both advocate a positive behavioral philosophy, encouraging individuals to pursue their own interests while also paying attention to the interests of others and the overall well-being of society. This shared value system promotes mutual support and promotion in practice, which is particularly important in individual case services.

Secondly, the practice of helping others while helping oneself can also draw on the concept of self-interest and altruism. When individuals help others, they should fully respect the autonomy and agency of those seeking help, that is, respect the self-determination of clients, and stimulate their enthusiasm and creativity. By guiding those in need through cooperation and sharing, helping them gradually overcome difficulties and achieve self-growth, individuals can also promote their own growth and improvement. At the same time, in the current situation of economic downturn, decreased social donations, and contracted government purchasing of services, social workers should appropriately consider achieving "self-help" through "self-interest", first addressing their own survival and development issues before considering "altruism" and "helping others", rather than blindly waiting for the "spring of social work". Finally, in actual social work, social workers can integrate the concepts of "self-interest and altruism" and "helping others while helping oneself". Modern social work is a helping activity and is therefore altruistic, which is uncontested ^[9]. This means that while helping clients, social workers are also continuously improving their professional competence and interpersonal skills. For example, when dealing with cases of domestic violence, social workers can enhance their professional competence through continuous learning and practice ("self-interest"), use their professional knowledge and skills to assist victims ("altruism"), encourage victims to seek solutions autonomously, and stimulate their autonomy and agency ("helping others while helping oneself"), ultimately achieving effective resistance and self-protection, thereby maximizing the safeguarding of their own rights and interests.

7. Conclusion

This article, through a comparative study of the application of the two concepts of self-interest and altruism, and helping others while helping oneself in social work, reveals the intrinsic connections and differences between them. Although these two concepts differ in social work, they are not mutually exclusive; rather, they each have their own unique characteristics and complement each other, jointly driving the development of the social

work profession. In future social work practice, we should further explore how to better integrate these two concepts to provide more high-quality and comprehensive social services. At the same time, social workers should continuously improve their professional competence and comprehensive abilities to better practice these two concepts and contribute to the harmony and stability of society. This will achieve the common progress and development of social workers and the social work profession, thereby promoting the progress and development of individuals and society.

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