

## Institutional Pension Service: The Role, Dilemma and Way out of Social Workers-Taking H Pension Welfare Institution as an Example

Xinying Chen

School of Public Administration  
Guangdong University of Foreign Studies  
Guangzhou, China  
Email: [845500265@qq.com](mailto:845500265@qq.com)  
China

### ABSTRACT

*With the intensification of the Chinese population aging trend, the demand for institutional pension is rising. As a delivery system of social welfare services, social work can promote the development of institutional pension services in China. In this respect, social workers should play the roles of service providers, demand and service evaluators, emotional and action supporters, resource linkers, resource and information managers in institutional pension, and promote the orderly progress of various services. However, through the case analysis of an H pension welfare institution, it is found that social workers and the H pension institution do not have a clear understanding of the role of social workers, and social work agency adopts "stocking" pattern for social workers, both of which lead to two dilemmas of role specialization and administrative tendency. In this regard, the following methods are proposed to solve the problem of role dilemma. The social work agency establishes long-term professional training mechanisms and incentive mechanisms. The H pension welfare institution needs to enhance its awareness of the role of social workers and give them more freedom to provide services. The government promotes the establishment of a sound incentive mechanism for the social work industry.*

**Keywords:** pension institution; social work; role dilemma

### 1. Introduction

According to statistics from the Ministry of Civil Affairs, "As of the end of 2019, the population of elderly people aged 60 and above in the country reached 253.88 million, accounting for 18.1% of the total population."<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that by 2025, the population over 60 years old will reach 300 million, and China will become a super-aged country. China's aging population is showing an obvious trend of a large number of elderly people, rapid growth, aging, disability, and empty-nesting. In response to aging, the state has issued relevant policy documents. In November 2019, The National Plan for Actively Dealing with Population Aging in the Medium and Long Term proposed "a multi-layer elderly care service system based on the home, supported by the community, fully developed institutions, and organically integrated medical care."<sup>2</sup> Since the Chinese community pension is still in its infancy, institutional pensions have become an important choice during the transition period. After long-term development, as of 2019, the total number of elderly care institutions in China has reached 34,369. The "Opinions on Promoting the Development of Elderly Care Services" of the General Office of the State Council proposes to promote the large-scale development of pension welfare institutions and list social work services as one of the key government purchases.<sup>3</sup>

In institutional elderly care services, social work can play the role of individualizing elderly services, protecting the interests and improving the quality of life of the elderly, integrating institutional resources, and promoting the development of institutional elderly services. That is in line with the country's active aging development direction. It is worthwhile to further study that social work intervention in institutional elderly care services, their roles and practice effects in it, and the ways to play the roles of social workers more effectively. To clarify the role-playing situation and dilemma of social workers in institutional pensions, the participatory observation method was used to enter an H pension welfare institution for a three-month survey. Explore the role practice of social workers in the H pension welfare institution, analyze the reasons for the dilemma of their role, and finally try to propose solutions.

### 2. The role that social workers should play in pension welfare institutions

The role expectations of social workers in institutional elderly care services are service provider, evaluator of needs and services, a supporter of emotions and actions, resource linker, and manager of resource and information.

#### 2.1 Service provider

*Service Provider* is the primary role of social workers(Wang,2014). Social workers are supposed to formulate service goals under policies and regulations, service purchasers' requirements, and service client's needs. They provide services including psychological consultation, opinion consultation, material assistance, and labor assistance. Social workers ought to carry out health

<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.mca.gov.cn/article/sj/tjgb/202009/20200900029333.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> Source: [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-11/21/content\\_5454347.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2019-11/21/content_5454347.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Source: [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2019-04/16/content\\_5383270.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2019-04/16/content_5383270.htm)

promotion and health maintenance services to meet the health maintenance needs of the elderly and carry out activities to meet the needs of entertainment and leisure, and community integration.

In addition, social workers are supposed to provide new homes for the elderly to stay adaptation service. Provide services for low self-esteem elders to cherish their memory. Provide casework and group work for them with deviations in perception and behavior. Help nursing workers improve their professional skills and stress relief services, etc. The role of service providers requires social workers to provide different services to help the elderly out of the woods, to meet their different needs, and improve the quality of their life.

### **2.2 Evaluator of needs Service**

Social workers ought to play *service* the role of evaluator, assess the problems and needs of service clients, and evaluate the process and effectiveness of social worker services. In service, social workers are supposed to assess the process to identify problems, improve deficiencies and grasp the service progress. When the service is over, they should evaluate the achievement of the service goal, collect feedback from the service objects, and provide references for social workers to reflect on and improve the service. Playing the role of the evaluator can help the service provided by social workers accurately meet the needs of the service clients so that the service process does not deviate from the planned track.

### **2.3 Supporter emotions and actions**

The role of supporter refers *actions* to social workers dealing with the cognitive and emotional problems of the elderly and guiding them in a positive direction. Social workers encourage the elderly to make positive behavior changes when facing difficulties and support them to turn these positive emotions and behaviors into a new normal life. They create conditions to teach the elderly to learn to help themselves. In pension welfare institutions, social workers are supposed to conduct casework after establishing professional relationships with elders who have emotional and behavioral problems. They use theories such as ABC theory, advantage perspective, and empowerment theory to help the elderly get out of emotional dilemmas and encourage them to overcome difficulties and make positive changes. Group work and community activities ought to be used to encourage elders to integrate into the community and establish a network of interpersonal relationships. For the elders in pension welfare institutions, the supporter role of social workers is another important support force besides family and peer groups.

### **2.4. Resource linker**

To meet the different needs of the elderly in the institutions, social workers should link the resources required for the service from multiple sources and pass the linked resources to the service clients. The objects of social workers' link resources mainly consist of government departments, the general public, social work institutions, elderly care institutions, other social workers, and other workers. When social workers carry out medium or large-scale activities, they are supposed to link resources of human, finance, and material to promote the achievement of service goals and meet the needs of the elderly at different levels. Human resources consist of professionals and volunteers, financial resources refer to the funds needed for social work services, and material resources include medical equipment, daily necessities, clothing, food, etc. Social workers give full play to the role of resource linkers so that they can make the best use of the available resources to help the elderly get out of difficulties, meet the needs at different levels, and improve the quality of their life.

### **2.5 Manager of resource and information**

The role and responsibilities of resource and information manager include resource information management and service client's information management. Resource management consists of recording information about resource types and resource acquisition methods, and managing resources. Social workers are supposed to integrate the available social resource information with the existing material information in pension welfare institutions. Information management consists of the recording and management of service client's information and service process documents. In pension welfare institutions, social workers ought to play the role of resource and information manager, match the needs of the elderly with the resources, and improve the efficiency of resource use and the degree of satisfaction of the needs. For example, they are supposed to coordinate the time and ability of volunteers with the needs of the elderly to strike a balance. In addition, some enterprises regularly donate materials to pension welfare institutions, social workers ought to convey the collected information about the needs of the elderly to the pension welfare institutions. It can not only meet the needs of the elderly but also maximize the role of the materials donated by the company. The role of resource and information manager can help social workers to organically integrate resources and services from a more comprehensive perspective, making their services more efficient.

## **3. Dilemma of Social Workers' Role in H Pension Welfare Institution**

### **3.1 Basic Information of H Pension Welfare Institution**

The object of this research is H pension welfare institution, a public pension welfare institution. Nearly 200 elders are living in the H institution, of which elders over 80 account for the largest proportion. Elderly needs in the H institution mainly consist of health maintenance, residential adaptation, economic security, social participation, marriage and family services, entertainment and leisure, residential security, and funeral arrangements. The H institution purchases social work services from a social work agency, which sends 2 social workers to this H institution to provide services. These social workers are employed by the agency and managed by the H institution.

### **3.2 Dilemma of Social Workers' Role in H Pension Welfare Institution**

The Social workers need to play a corresponding role in the H institution to provide services for the elderly. However, after three months of internship investigation, it was found that they failed to perform their roles properly due to different factors in practice, and there were certain role dilemmas. The role dilemma of these social workers in H pension welfare institution is mainly reflected in two aspects: the dilemma of role specialization and the dilemma of administrative tendency.

#### **3.2.1 The dilemma of role specialization**

Institutional elderly care services have role expectations for social workers, and these expectations have shaped the ideal role of social workers. But in real life, they play a practical role under the guidance of comprehension roles, which is far from ideal roles in most cases. The role gap refers to the difference between the ideal role and the practical role(Yu,1998).

First of all, the social worker's perception of his ideal role affects how he performs the role. In the H institution, the social workers position themselves as an auxiliary role for other staff. Based on the positioning of this auxiliary role, they no longer emphasize role uniqueness and professionalism in their services. However, when playing the role of a service provider, services of social workers should have both interest-based services and therapeutic services. In the H institution, the content of social work services is concentrated in the entertainment field, and there is insufficient attention to therapeutic services.

Second, the professional level of social workers affects the effect of role-playing. When playing the role of a needs assessor, they are supposed to classify the different physical and psychological conditions of the elderly. On this basis, social workers evaluate the different characteristics of the elderly and formulate corresponding service plans. However, in H pension welfare institution, due to lack of professional ability, the needs assessment of the social workers not only stays on the surface but also only focuses on the elderly who actively express their needs. The ability to assess needs has a great influence on the subsequent development of service plans for the elderly. When acting as a resource linker, they ought to extensively obtain resources from the H institution and society. However, the focus of these social workers is limited to the H institution, and their ability to obtain social resources is low. As a result, few resources can be used in social work services, and the service is restricted. When the role of resource linker is not played well, the role of resource manager has nothing to manage.

#### **3.2.2 The dilemma of role administrative tendency**

Although social workers are employed by a third-party social worker agency, they are managed by the H pension welfare institution. In addition, most of the resources obtained by them in providing services come from the H institution, which increases their dependence on the H institution and causes the social worker's role dilemma.

The dilemma of the administrative tendency of the role is mainly reflected in the fact that the H institution does not recognize the professional value of social workers. The H institution assigns administrative work to them and even treats them as administrative personnel. For example, the manager of the H institution requires the social worker to input medical information into the computer and print them out. When there is a time conflict between social worker's services and administrative work, they are required to give priority to the work arranged by the H institution. The administrative work of the H institution squeezed the time of social workers to provide professional services and disrupted their service plans. The contradiction between the Administration and Specialization affects their ideal role in the H institution and leads to social workers' marginalization and nonprofessionalism in the institutional pension service system.

### **4. Analysis of the causes of the dilemma of social workers' role**

#### **4.1 Social workers do not have a clear understanding of roles**

The role-playing ability and psychology of role players influence role-playing from within(Ding,1992). The role positioning and professional level of social workers affect the role play. The social workers of H pension welfare institutions lack professional competence and professional self-confidence in their services, positioning themselves as auxiliary roles for other staff. As a result, they actively or passively give up their rights in the field of professional services, and in turn, aggravated the improper positioning of the role of social workers by the H institution and service clients.

#### **4.2 The H pension welfare institution do not have a clear understanding of the role of social workers**

First of all, the administrators of the H institution do not understand the functions and roles of social workers and equate them with volunteers. Under such vague cognition, the administrative staff assigns the social workers the administrative tasks they deem appropriate. The H institution has low expectations for the professional role of these social workers, so there is little service space for them. They are trapped in low-level service activities and passively assume administrative tasks other than their duties, which makes the work tend to be administrative. Social workers and H pension welfare institutions have jointly branded the role of social workers with auxiliary characteristics, which restricted the professional role.

Secondly, in social and cultural backgrounds, the emphasis on treatment is much higher than that on prevention. Because in many cases, the results of treatment are more dazzling than the results of prevention. Since the services of social workers in the H institution are mainly prevention and development, which makes the recognition of social workers among service clients and other staff far lower than medical staff.

#### 4.3 Social work agency adopt “stocking” pattern

Social workers of the H institution are staff hired by social work agencies, and the social work agency has the responsibility of leading and managing them. The "stocking" of social workers by the agency is embodied in the management and cultivation and the incentives. In terms of management and cultivation, the social workers of the H institution are not closely connected with the social work agency. These are reflected in the following aspects. First, the staffing of supervisors is unreasonable. The agency cannot guarantee monthly supervision services for these social workers. After encountering problems, they cannot receive supervision services for a long time, and over time they will give up solving them and settle for the status quo. Second, the learning opportunities provided by the agency are insufficient, and there are few opportunities for social workers to learn and improve. What's more, when there is a learning activity organized by the agency, they must leave one person on duty at the H institution. The lack of professional knowledge and skills learning opportunities is not conducive to social workers providing professional services to the elderly.

In terms of talent incentives, the incentives for social workers are not only reflected in salary, but also job promotion. Reasonable incentives can increase work enthusiasm, promote self-development and retain them. Combined with the actual situation of the H institution, the salary level of this social worker post is low, and there is no room for a salary increase in the future. In addition, the social workers in the H institution lack promotion channels. Even if the social workers perform well, they cannot get the opportunity to be promoted to better positions. If things go on like this, social workers will lack the motivation to make progress. They will either choose to settle for the status quo and repeatedly provide low-level professional services, or they will quit their jobs. This is not conducive to social workers' role and function in the H institution.

### 5. Measures

Social workers harm their role positioning and role play due to insufficient professional capabilities and knowledge reserves. In response to the problems, corresponding countermeasures are proposed at the three levels of the social work agency, the H pension welfare institution, and the government.

The social work agency has taken the following measures. First, the agency establishes a long-term professional training mechanism and regularly organizes social workers to learn theories and work skills. Through learning to improve the professional capabilities, help them to better play their roles and improve service levels. Second, increase the deployment of supervisors, increase the frequency and quality of supervision of social workers, and give full play to the education, support, and administrative roles of supervisors. According to the Ministry of Civil Affairs' Social Work Supervision Guide, each supervisor's supervision object should be controlled within 5 persons to ensure the quality of supervision. Third, formulate a reasonable incentive mechanism to open up promotion channels for these social workers, ensure that they have room for upward development, and stimulate their enthusiasm for work.

As the purchaser of services, the H institution first needs to raise awareness of the profession of social work. Only by correctly understanding and positioning the role of social workers can the role be maximized and the benefits of purchasing social workers' services can be maximized. Secondly, the H institution needs to enable the social workers to have more room for development in the field of professional services. It is supposed to reduce service restrictions on these social workers, and give them the greatest service selection and provision rights at work.

The government can, directly and indirectly, help social workers play their role better. First, formulate comprehensive policies related to social worker's positions and functions, clearly define their role from the policy, and reduce the problem of unclear understanding between service buyers and themselves. Second, the government promotes the social work industry to formulate a promotion mechanism for them to reduce the brain drain. Third, strengthen the professional and industry publicity to increase the public's understanding of them. Fourth, increase capital investment in the purchase of social work services and supervisor services.

### 6. Conclusions

This research focuses on the role of social workers in pension welfare institutions and explores the role of social workers in the H pension welfare institution. It is found that there are two dilemmas of role specialization and administrative tendency in the process of the social workers' role-playing. In response to the above-mentioned role dilemmas, try to find a way out through the three parties of the social work agency, the H pension welfare institution, and the government, to help the social workers get out of the role dilemma and play it better and promote the development of institutional elderly care services.

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