

A Study on the Synergistic Development Path of Community Governance and Social Work Stations in Northwest China from the Perspective of Social Work — Based on the analysis of X Community in Lanzhou City

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Abstract: With the continuous improvement of China's social service system, communities and social work stations, as important carriers of grassroots services, are gradually becoming an important part of solving people's livelihood problems and promoting social harmony. Communities are the basic units of social governance, and social work stations promote the further extension of community functions by providing professional social services. This paper starts with the current situation of the integration and development of communities and social work stations, analyzes their complementary roles in grassroots governance, and explores the paths and methods of their deep integration, with the aim of providing some references for promoting the sustainable development of communities and social work stations in northwest China.

Keywords: social work station, community governance path, synergistic development

1. Research background and method

1.1 Research background

Amid the global wave of urbanization, sustainable community development has become a common vision and action plan of the international community. Social work is one of the standards for measuring the all-round development of communities and society. Social work stations not only can leverage the professional advantages of social work, but also are conducive to enhancing the governance capacity of communities.[1] From the perspective of the pattern of grassroots community governance, the governance of urban and rural grassroots communities with the participation of multiple subjects has given up a reasonable space for the entry and development of social work services that maintain professional and market autonomy, and has also provided fertile ground for professional social work to penetrate into grassroots public services in terms of concepts and values.[2] The research data from the X community in Lanzhou City more clearly exposed the deep-seated contradictions in the integration process of social work stations and communities. There is an urgent need to base on local realities and explore a path of coordinated development that is both professional and feasible and adapted to the social and economic environment of the northwest region, so as to promote the modernization of the community governance system and governance capacity and contribute to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

1.2 Research method

This paper uses a hybrid paradigm approach. The participatory observation method was first used. From October 2023 to February 2024, the author interned at the X Community Social Work station, fully participating in community governance activities and documenting typical cases such as target alienation and resource allocation. Secondly, in-depth interviews were used to conduct semi-structured interviews with community workers, social workers, and residents to distill the differences in perception of synergistic development among all parties.

2. Conceptual definition

A community is a geographical unit where people live and interact collectively, characterized by territoriality, sociality, and cultural attributes. The social work stations at the township (sub-district) level (hereinafter referred to as "social work stations") are services purchased by the government from social organizations. These social organizations use professional social work methods to provide assistance to disadvantaged groups, services for the disabled, community governance, and improvement of community participation capabilities, etc. They are established to improve people's livelihood and enhance people's well-being. They are important hubs for social work to participate in community governance.[3]

3. Empirical Analysis of the Dilemma of Synergistic Development

3.1 The Dilemma of goal alienation and institutional embedding

In 2023, X community fell into the vicious circle of "performance governance" under the heavy pressure of administrative assessment. Under the pressure of administrative supervision, the service goals undertaken by social work stations have been broken down into quantified indicators, causing the services of social work stations to revolve around the inspection by higher authorities and quantified content. However, contrary to the project's emphasis on quantifying indicators, some social work service indicators are difficult to quantify. The data shows that the community has been subject to an average of 32 inspections by its superiors each year, with an average of one inspection every 11 days. The high frequency of inspections has forced more than half of the community's activities to revolve around the inspection cycle. This "examination-driven governance" model has pushed community workers and social work station staff into a cycle of "material preparation, venue arrangement, process practice", which has severely undermined the core value of social work services.

3.2 Ambiguous rights and responsibilities and organizational collaboration dilemma

In the practice of grassroots governance in X community, the problem of ambiguous rights and responsibilities between the community residents' committee and the social work station has become a key sticking point restricting coordinated development. In-depth interview data confirmed the contradiction: Three resident social workers complained that the community shifted complex tasks such as petition mediation and assistance to special groups, while community workers, adhering to the concept of "leaving professional matters to professional institutions", attempted to outsource all routine work such as policy promotion and demand research. This cognitive misalignment leads to a decline in service efficiency, not only causing repeated consumption of human resources, but also preventing residents' demands from being responded to in a timely manner.

3.3 Resource misallocation and service efficiency dilemma

The Implementation Plan for the Establishment of Social Work Service Stations in Townships (Sub-districts) of Lanzhou City in 2022 points out strict management of funds. Civil affairs bureaus of each county and district should urge the undertaking entities to use the funds in accordance with the law and regulations; The scope and content of services should be determined strictly in accordance with the direction of fund usage. In the annual budget of Community X, only 8.7% of the funds are for elderly-friendly renovations, while 21.3% of the funds are used for image projects. The misallocation of resources has led to funds prioritizing privileged groups, while those with genuine needs are often overlooked. The government-purchased service project of township social work stations is a project for serving people. Besides paying attention to the achievement of contract task indicators (quantity), it is even more necessary to attach importance to the "quality" of public services, including whether the project achievements are truly enjoyed by the target group.[4]

4. Strategies for Optimizing the path of coordinated Development

4.1 Loosening institutional and demand constraints

Establish a demand-centered assessment mechanism. The current assessment system of social work institutions is oriented towards the frequency of activities and media coverage. In the actual organization of activities, more emphasis is placed on the effect of photo shooting and the results of promotional video editing, rather than taking the satisfaction of residents' actual needs as the core evaluation criterion. In the course of work, social workers should, through a regular demand research mechanism, jointly sort out the list of community problems with resident representatives and dynamically adjust the priority of services based on urgency and service direction.

4.2 Reconfigure professional service positioning

Clarify the role of social work stations as the main providers of professional services and divest non-essential administrative functions through policy revisions. The government should take responsibility for the construction of the social work talent team in the construction of social work stations, determine the basic direction for social work stations, empower services, conduct supervision and scientific assessment.[5] Push local governments to shift social work stations from "administrative extension" to "professional collaboration". At the same time, establish a professional supervision and support system, with third-party institutions regularly assessing the professionalism of services to prevent service goals from deviating. Give social work stations flexibility and autonomy in resource allocation and establish a "demand-resource" fast matching channel. By establishing dedicated positions and personnel for social work, clarifying job functions and defining job divisions, the nature of professional social work services can be guaranteed, and excessive administratization of social

work can be avoided in terms of systems.[6]

4.3 Build a reverse supervision mechanism

Incorporate residents into the entire process of service design, implementation and evaluation through forms such as residents' councils and service evaluation meetings. Regularly publicize the list of social work station services and their completion status, have residents vote on the effectiveness of the services, and link the results to performance evaluations. To address the issue of performance-based governance where "the same group of residents repeatedly participate in activities", a "rotation system of service recipients" can be implemented.

5. Conclusion

Based on the practical exploration of X Community in Lanzhou City, this study deeply dissects the predicaments faced by the coordinated development of community governance and social work stations in the northwest region from the perspective of social work, and proposes targeted optimization paths.

In the process of co-development, Community X has exposed multi-dimensional problems. In response to the above issues, the study proposed a series of optimization strategies. Through multiple pathways such as institutional loosening, professional empowerment, resident empowerment and autonomy protection, social work stations are being transformed from "administrative performers" to "demand responders", achieving a dynamic balance between institutional embedding and professional services, providing theoretical references and practical guidance for the sustainable and coordinated development of communities and social work stations in northwest China.

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Author Bio

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