



# Government-led Emotional Intervention Countermeasures for Empty-nest Elderly in Urban Communities

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**Abstract:** This paper takes Gaozhen Community in Jinhua City, Zhejiang Province as an example with most priority, and the empty-nest elderly, community workers and the children of empty-nest elderly are interviewed in the community to expound the emotional needs of the empty-nest elderly in the city through field research and reference to relevant literature. At the same time, the reasons why these emotional needs of the elderly fail to be satisfied fail to be analyzed in this paper according to the interview discussion and literature review from the perspectives of personal cognition, family, society and government. Finally, some recommendations were put forwarded by governments in promoting emotional intervention among empty-nest elderly after we have understood that these empty nest elderly are demonstrated with emotional absence based on the characteristics of the community endowment under the new situation and feature of endowment of empty-nest elderly with the analysis of the problems of Jin Huagao community and on the basis of the spirit endowment patterns of elderly in the western developed countries.

**Keywords:** government-led, urban community, empty-nest elderly, emotional intervention

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## 1. Research objectives

With the rapid social change and transformation in China, empty-nest elderly, as a special group among the elderly, are endowed with some common characteristics of the elderly. Besides, they are unique to others of the same age bracket with other characteristics. By understanding and analyzing the problems existing in the life of the urban empty nest elderly, this paper explores the characteristics and subjective feelings of their economic support, life care, social support and spiritual support. And through the combination of formal support and informal support, the research on social support for empty-nest elderly in urban communities is carried out, aiming to help the government and society to give more effective care and help to empty-nest elderly.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Tendency in domestic research

#### 2.1.1 Research on the emotional needs of empty nest elderly

At present, China's academic research on the emotional needs of empty nest elderly is mainly involved in the spiritual endowment of empty nest elderly. Mu Guangzong, Wan Chunlong, Liang Yan, Liu Guili and other scholars have studied the spiritual support for empty-nest elderly. Professor Mu Guangzong divided spiritual support into three dimensions in the article "Spiritual Support for the Elderly", that is, personality respect, achievement at ease and emotional comfort, which correspond to the needs of self-esteem, expectation and affection of the elderly respectively. On the basis of summarizing previous experience, Liang Yan proposed that spiritual support for the elderly should include paying attention to the spiritual and psychological needs of the elderly, and spiritual comfort is generally reflected in economic support and life care. At the same time, she believes that financial support and life care are just ways for parents to seek spiritual comfort.

#### 2.1.2 Research on the government's response to empty nest elderly

In current studies, most scholars take government as one dimension among multiple dimensions for analysis to put forward the countermeasures by governments. However, some scholars give focuses on the analysis of the government's responsibility in the elderly care. For example, Zhou Xianglian and Liu Ying argued in "Discussion on the Government's Responsibility for the Spiritual Endowment of Empty Nest Elderly in Rural Areas" that the government should build a clear responsibility system from the aspects of strengthening filial piety culture and education, clarifying the function positioning of institutions, and improving the community service system. Pan Jinhong described the responsibilities that the government should assume from the perspectives of intergenerational fairness, humanitarianism, social justice, legal responsibility, public

management function and international experience in his Pension Responsibility in Multi-dimensions By Government.

## **2.2 Dynamics of foreign research**

Due to the early emergence of the problem in empty-nest elderly and the high material living standard in western and foreign developed countries, the academic circle began to pay attention to the emotional problems of empty-nest elderly for a long time, and there are different aspects of the research. Pillay believes that when children are separated from their parents' family, parents are prone to feelings of alienation, resulting in loneliness and depression, also known as "Empty Nest Syndrome". Denes holds that a sense of loneliness can easily lead to anxiety, depression, despair and other psychological diseases, and the death rate of the elderly with loneliness is higher than that of the elderly without loneliness. Whiflatch and Eye argue that care-givers will suffer less pressure in daily life and emotion if the elderly and family members are given proper counseling.

In foreign countries, the research on the role of the government in dealing with issues related to the empty-nest elderly mainly starts from the study of endowment insurance system. There are three modes of government responsibility: Full accountability by government, sharing of accountability by government and individuals and individual accountability.

## **3. Investigation on the emotional needs of empty-nesters in Gaozhen Community, Jinhua**

### **3.1 Investigation overview**

The community investigated in this study is Gaozhen Community located in Jinhua city, Zhejiang Province, which is located in the central part of Zhejiang province with relatively developed economy. The author interviewed 15 empty nest elderly in this community according to the interview outline and recorded the main situation of these 15 empty nest elderly. If there are two elderly living together in an empty nest family, only one of them will be interviewed.

In terms of gender, there were 8 males and 7 females among the 15 surveyed elderly people, which was in line with normal rules. In terms of age, there are 7 people between 60 and 70 years old, 6 people aged between 70 and 80, and 2 people over 80 years old. The number of people is reasonably distributed. In terms of spouses, there were 3 divorced and 3 widowed, and 9 married and living with their spouses. In terms of health condition, only 2 people were physically inconvenient or had serious diseases, and the other 13 people were above average. From the perspective of occupational information and economic level, most of the surveyed elderly are retired employees of public institutions with their own pensions or pensions. Most of them have abundant economic conditions, which are in line with the characteristics of relatively developed economy in this region.

### **3.2 Types of emotional needs of empty nest elderly**

#### **3.2.1 Needs of empty nest elderly in affections**

In the field interview, some empty-nest elderly who live alone due to divorce, widower and other reasons were interviewed by us. When it came to "do you feel lonely living alone? Have you ever thought of finding another partner? ", "Is there any longing for love affairs?", several elderly people felt that they were too old to look for a partner, while several elderly people expressed their expectations for love affairs and finding another partner.

According to the elderly interviewed, as most of their children live and work in other places, they seldom go home and are open-minded, they generally support their parents to find another partner. They believe that their parents are old and they are away from them for a long time, so they will feel relieved to have someone to accompany them.

#### **3.2.2 Needs of the empty-nest elderly in kinship**

Out of the 15 empty-nest elderly interviewed, as it came to the question "Do your children visit you on most occasions?", only 6 elderly said that their children often go home although they are not with them, and the remaining 9 elderly said that their children work in cities far away from home and seldom come home. While, as it came to the question "Do you miss your children when they are not at home? When do you show your earnest expectation?" , the elderly have expressed their desire for their children to return home.

#### **3.2.3 Needs of friendship and sense of belonging of empty-nest elderly**

According to the survey of the interview, it can be known that some elderly people move from the countryside to the city because their children buy them houses in the city and some villagers in neighboring urban villages were forced to live in cities because their land was expropriated due to expansion of city. For these old people, they have spent most of their life in the countryside, and they are prone to be unaccustomed to the urban life if they leave the countryside where they have lived for many years and coming to the city. Besides, the absence of their children makes them more prone to psychological

problems such as loneliness and anxiety.

## **4. Analysis of reasons for emotional problems of empty nest elderly in urban communities**

### **4.1 Personal cognition: Denial and self-denial of self-worth**

The lack of confidence in oneself is also reflected in the attitude towards the pursuit of love. According to the previous survey on the love affairs of empty-nest elderly, although it can be seen that some old people do have a need for love affair and are eager to find a spouse, the communication between two people often ends in daily life. To a large extent, this is due to empty-nesters' lack of confidence in themselves, believing that they are too old to mess around and giving up the idea of further development.

### **4.2 Family factors: Inadequate care by children and relatives**

In the current "421" structure family, a couple, on most occasions, are required to support 4 old people, which leads to inadequate care by young people for the elderly. It can be seen that due to the change of family structure, the filial sons and daughters can not always accompany their parents, and the old people can not enjoy the happiness of the family, and their emotions are difficult to get the due satisfaction, which inevitably makes the old people feel lonely.

With the quickening pace of urban life and increasing work pressure, children are frequently engaged with their own careers and may have to work overtime even during holidays. At the same time, due to closer economic ties between different regions, personnel transfers have forced children to work further away from home. All this makes children have less time to take care of their parents.

### **4.3 Government factors: More attention to material needs while less efforts in emotional needs**

Throughout the laws related to the rights and interests of the elderly, there are many provisions to protect the rights of the elderly. For example, the Constitution stipulates that adult children are endowed with the obligation to support and assist their parents. However, the description of these laws and regulations is still relatively at a general pattern without detailed interpretation, and few of them specifically involve the emotional or spiritual needs of the elderly.

Although the government invests a large amount of money in the infrastructure construction of the community every year, including the construction of some sports facilities and activity centers for the elderly, these facilities can indeed enrich the emotional world of the elderly to a certain extent, but they are still in short supply in the face of the increasing number of the elderly. At the same time, there are few special funds for empty nesters or the emotional and spiritual needs of the elderly, and there are many restrictions in the actual use.

### **4.4 Social factors: Social prejudice and imperfection of non-governmental organizations**

Social discrimination against the elderly is called "ageism". Most people always subconsciously think that old people are useless and their life is meaningless. There are even extreme comments on the Internet that "I will commit suicide when I get old". When the elderly, especially the empty-nest elderly and those living alone, feel the discrimination and prejudice of the society against the elderly, it is easy to think that they are abandoned by their families and the society because their relatives and friends are not around, which further deepens the self-denial of their own value.

In general, in recent years, China's non-Governmental organizations witnessed slow development with small scale and low quantity, which failed to exert certain influence on the society, nor helped the government provide solution to its problems in an effective manner, and their actual actions have not been implemented. In the interview, we also learned that many NGOs are small in scale and lack of funds, and their activities are often carried out intermittently.

## **5. Some recommendations on the emotional intervention by government for empty-nest elderly**

The proactive and leading role of Chinese government is manifested mainly in the financial support, legislative support, idea transmission, organization guidance and supervision support.

### **5.1 Provide financial support and tax guidance**

Kirk, a British constitutional thinker, explained the main role of government: A country is a group of free people who unite under rational guidance in order to enjoy rights and common interests. In other words, the responsibility of the government lies in the realization of resource and benefit sharing distribution under the mechanism of justice. It is the fundamental responsibility of the government to increase financial support and empty-nest elderly should be endowed the

right to share social resources and benefits.

## **5.2 Formulate and improve laws and regulations**

As mentioned above, China's current laws related to the elderly have few provisions on the protection of the spiritual or emotional needs of the elderly. Although the government has begun to pay attention to the light rigid demands of the elderly in recent years, the process proved to be carried out at slow pace, and further attention and improvement are required from the government. At the same time, compared with some developed countries, laws and regulations in this field in our country is obvious too generally promulgated with low operability. In some developed countries such as Sweden and Finland, the law of the country can be applied and quantified. The law stipulates that children's spiritual support to their parents has been made clear that it is related to the living distance, contact time and frequency, which can be quantitative. As a result, it is easy for implementation and supervision. Definitely, the formulation of these laws can not be blindly applied, but needs to be refined and improved by China's law makers based on China's national conditions through continuous observation and practice.

## **5.3 Guide publicity and education work**

The government should do a good job in controlling the mainstream social atmosphere. By publicizing and reporting on the mainstream social media, the government should break down the current discriminatory remarks about the old people being useless and useless to the society and properly control the number of reports about how unsatisfactory and miserable the life of empty nesters is, and promote positive remarks. Let empty nesters feel that even empty nests can still live a happy and fulfilling life.

In today's western culture invasion, the strengthening of the temptation of the outside world and the increasing pressure of city life make more and more young people to ignore the importance of the "filial piety" culture, which fails to enable or rarely enable the empty nest elderly to obtain care from their children. Therefore, the government should continue to vigorously promote the culture of filial piety has not played a guiding role in children's filial piety. Therefore, the government should continue to strengthen the promotion of the culture of filial piety in the mainstream media, so as to promote children's psychological care for their parents.

Virtually, the change of concept of the elderly in empty nest will have a significant impact on whether they can enjoy their remaining life. Under the influence of traditional culture, the elderly always feel that they cannot live without their children. Therefore, the idea of empty-nest elderly must be eliminated in order to achieve their inner prosperity.

## **5.4 Strengthen the community service team and improve the service quality**

We will build a team for the elderly in spiritual care services in urban community. The aggregation effect is developed by most of the empty nest elderly in domestic cities, that is, in a city, there will be a large number of elderly people in several neighborhoods or communities, and there will be a corresponding number of empty nest elderly. Most of these elderly people have certain economic strength with more focuses on emotion. At the same time, because in most cities, especially in the third and fourth tier cities, there are very few people engaged in the spiritual care services for the elderly, so there is a great demand for the spiritual care workers. In the city, due to the pressure of competition, many enterprise workers become unemployed, so they can be specially trained to develop a full-time mental endowment service team. At the same time, we should attach importance to the strength of some non-governmental organizations, and recruit community and social enthusiasts as part-time service teams or volunteer teams.

## **5.5 Clarify the functions of each department, and coordinate and promote work from point to area**

At present, our government departments related to old-age work mainly include those in medical and health care, social security or human resources, etc. , with particular emphasis on the work. However, in the actual operation process, there will still be the problem of ambiguous functional positioning and mutual bickering. Therefore, it is necessary to further clarify the functions of various departments and standardize them based on laws, so as to strengthen the coordination and cooperation ability of various departments and enhance the authority of their care services for the elderly. However, the office of the Commission on the elderly, which is responsible for the overall promotion of work related to the elderly group, fails to be with enough authority in some grass-roots areas. As a result, the government is required to make it clear in law that it is the functional department of government that is endowed to protect the rights and interests of the elderly group, and government should be empowered with the qualification of the subject of administrative law enforcement, so that it can coordinate various departments to implement the law on the protection of the rights and interests of the elderly.

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