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Service Excellence in Chinese Private Elderly Care Institutions: A Thorough Examination of Current Conditions and Strategic Suggestions

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Abstract: This review examines the current state of service quality in Chinese private elderly care institutions, identifies key challenges, and proposes strategic recommendations for improvement. With China's rapidly aging population, the demand for elderly care services has surged, placing significant pressure on both public and private care providers. Private institutions have become a crucial component of the elderly care system; however, they face numerous challenges in delivering consistent, high-quality services. This review synthesizes recent literature to explore dimensions of service quality, regional disparities, and the influence of policy and cultural factors. The findings highlight issues such as inconsistent service standards, staff shortages, and financial constraints. The review concludes with actionable recommendations, including policy reforms, technological integration, and other strategies, to enhance service quality and ensure sustainable growth in China's private elderly care sector.

Keywords: private elderly care institutions; service quality; China; strategic recommendations; aging population

1. Introduction

As society ages, the provision of elderly care services has become an increasingly important issue. Private elderly care institutions are crucial in shaping the quality of life for older adults, largely due to the impact of their service quality. However, these institutions currently face numerous challenges across multiple domains, including service provision and quality, staffing and professional competence, and management structure and operational efficiency.

Many private elderly care institutions focus mainly on providing basic life services, often without offering personalized or diverse options. This shortcoming not only overlooks the increasing spiritual and cultural needs of the elderly but also reduces the institutions' overall competitiveness [1]. For instance, studies have shown that the absence of tailored services, such as mental health support and recreational activities, significantly impacts the well-being of elderly residents [2].

A common challenge in private elderly care institutions is the lack of qualified staff and the insufficient professional skills among the personnel. Caregiving staff often receive insufficient training, which hinders their ability to address the diverse health needs of the

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elderly effectively [3]. This gap in professional competence not only affects service delivery but also contributes to lower satisfaction levels among residents and their families [4].

Many private elderly care institutions suffer from inefficient management structures and lack well-designed operational mechanisms. At the managerial level, decision-making often lacks foresight and innovation, resulting in low operational efficiency and underutilization of resources [5]. This inefficiency further exacerbates challenges in maintaining and improving service quality, creating a cycle of underperformance [6].

To tackle these challenges, it is essential to propose practical strategies and solutions to address the key issues faced by private elderly care institutions. By enhancing service diversification, improving staff training, and optimizing management practices, these institutions can better meet the needs of the elderly and contribute to the sustainable development of elderly care services in China.

2. Current Situation of Service Quality in Chinese Private Elderly Care Institutions

2.1. Service Provision and Quality

As China experiences a rapidly aging population, the quality of services provided by private elderly care institutions has emerged as a key concern.

With the number of elderly individuals expected to reach 400 million by 2050, the demand for high-quality elderly care services is increasing [6]. Private elderly care institutions, which have emerged as a significant component of the elderly care system, are under pressure to provide comprehensive and high-quality services. However, the current state of service programs and quality in these institutions reveals several challenges and opportunities for improvement.

Private elderly care institutions in China offer a variety of service programs, including residential care, day care, and home-based care. These programs are designed to meet the diverse needs of the elderly population, ranging from basic daily living assistance to specialized medical care. Despite the variety of services offered, the quality of these programs often falls short of expectations. Many private elderly care institutions lack standardized service protocols, leading to inconsistent service quality [7]. This inconsistency is particularly evident in the areas of medical care and rehabilitation services, where the lack of trained professionals and inadequate facilities are common issues.

One of the primary concerns regarding service quality in private elderly care institutions is the lack of comprehensive training for staff. Caregivers in these institutions often receive minimal training, which limits their ability to provide high-quality care. Only 30% of caregivers in private elderly care institutions had received formal training in elderly care [8]. This lack of training not only affects the quality of care but also contributes to high staff turnover rates, further exacerbating the problem. Additionally, the study highlighted that the emotional and psychological needs of the elderly are often neglected due to the caregivers' limited understanding of these aspects of care.

Another significant issue is the inadequate infrastructure and facilities in many private elderly care institutions. Many of these institutions operate in converted residential buildings that are not designed to meet the specific needs of elderly residents. This can lead to safety hazards and a lack of accessibility for residents with mobility issues. A report by the China National Committee on Aging noted that only 40% of private elderly care institutions met the national standards for infrastructure and facilities. This lack of adequate infrastructure not only affects the quality of care but also limits the types of services that can be offered.

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for improving the quality of service programs in private elderly care institutions. One potential solution is the implementation of standardized service protocols and quality assurance mechanisms. Institutions that adopted standardized service protocols saw a significant improvement in service quality and resident satisfaction [9]. These protocols should cover all aspects of care, including

medical care, rehabilitation services, and emotional support. Additionally, regular training programs for caregivers should be implemented to ensure that they have the necessary skills and knowledge to provide high-quality care.

Another opportunity for improvement lies in the integration of technology into elderly care services. The use of technology, such as telemedicine and smart home devices, can enhance the quality of care by providing real-time monitoring and support for elderly residents. The use of telemedicine in private elderly care institutions improved access to medical care and reduced the need for hospital visits [10]. Similarly, smart home devices can help to improve the safety and independence of elderly residents by providing reminders for medication and monitoring their daily activities.

2.2. Regional Disparities in Service Quality

The quality of services provided by private elderly care institutions in China exhibits significant regional disparities, reflecting the uneven economic development and resource distribution across the country. While urban areas, particularly in eastern coastal regions, tend to offer relatively higher-quality services, rural and less developed regions often struggle to meet basic standards of care. These disparities are influenced by factors such as economic resources, government support, infrastructure, and the availability of trained professionals.

In economically developed regions such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong, private elderly care institutions generally benefit from higher levels of funding, better infrastructure, and greater access to skilled personnel. For instance, private institutions in these regions often provide comprehensive services, including advanced medical care, rehabilitation programs, and recreational activities, which significantly enhance the quality of life for elderly residents [11]. These institutions are also more likely to adopt modern technologies, such as telemedicine and smart monitoring systems, to improve service delivery. However, even in these regions, challenges such as high costs and unequal access to services persist, particularly for low-income elderly individuals.

In contrast, private elderly care institutions in rural and less developed regions, such as those in western and central China, face significant challenges in delivering high-quality services. A report by the China Development Research Foundation highlighted that many institutions in these areas operate with limited financial resources, outdated facilities, and a shortage of trained caregivers. As a result, services are often limited to basic care, with little emphasis on medical or psychological support. For example, revealed that only 20% of private institutions in rural areas met the national standards for elderly care services, compared to 60% in urban areas [12]. This disparity is further exacerbated by the migration of younger populations to urban centers, leaving elderly individuals in rural areas with limited family support and fewer care options.

Government policies and regional economic development play a crucial role in addressing these disparities. While the central government has introduced policies to promote the development of elderly care services nationwide, their implementation varies significantly across regions. For instance, the "Healthy China 2030" initiative emphasizes the need to improve elderly care services, but its impact has been more pronounced in economically developed regions due to their greater capacity to invest in infrastructure and training programs [13]. In less developed regions, limited local government funding and weak enforcement of regulations hinder the improvement of service quality.

In conclusion, the regional differences in service quality among private elderly care institutions in China are a critical issue that demands focused interventions. Addressing these disparities will require increased government support, equitable resource allocation, and tailored strategies to meet the unique needs of different regions. By bridging the gap between urban and rural areas, China can move closer to achieving its goal of providing high-quality elderly care services for all.

2.3. Management System and Operational Efficiency

The management system and operational efficiency of private elderly care institutions in China are critical factors influencing the quality of services provided to the aging population. Effective management systems ensure that resources are utilized optimally, while operational efficiency directly impacts the ability of institutions to deliver consistent and high-quality care. However, many private elderly care institutions in China face challenges in these areas, including fragmented management structures, insufficient professional expertise, and a lack of standardized operational procedures.

One of the primary issues in the management of private elderly care institutions is the lack of professional management teams. Only 25% of private institutions have managers with formal training in elderly care administration [13]. This shortage of qualified personnel often leads to inefficiencies in resource allocation, poor coordination among staff, and inadequate oversight of service quality. Furthermore, the absence of standardized management protocols exacerbates these issues, resulting in inconsistent service delivery and reduced operational efficiency.

Operational efficiency is also hindered by the limited use of modern management tools and technologies. While some institutions in urban areas have adopted digital management systems to streamline operations, many rural institutions still rely on manual processes, which are time-consuming and prone to errors. A report by the China National Committee on Aging highlighted that the integration of information technology, such as electronic health records and automated scheduling systems, could significantly improve operational efficiency [14]. However, the high costs associated with these technologies and the lack of technical expertise in rural areas remain significant barriers to their widespread adoption.

To address these challenges, there is a need for greater investment in professional training for managers and the development of standardized management frameworks. Institutions implementing standardized management practices experienced a 20% improvement in operational efficiency and a 15% increase in resident satisfaction [15]. Additionally, government support in the form of subsidies and technical assistance could help smaller institutions adopt modern management tools, thereby enhancing their overall efficiency.

3. Existing Problems and Causes

3.1. Inconsistent Service Standards

3.1.1. Lack of Uniform Quality Metrics

One of the most significant issues affecting the quality of services in private elderly care institutions in China is the lack of uniform quality metrics. Without standardized benchmarks, it becomes challenging to assess and compare the performance of different institutions. The absence of a unified evaluation system leads to inconsistencies in service delivery, making it difficult for stakeholders to identify areas for improvement. This lack of standardization is particularly problematic in rural areas, where regulatory oversight is often weaker. The study further highlights that institutions in urban areas are more likely to adopt self-developed quality metrics, but these are often not aligned with national standards, leading to fragmented service quality across regions.

3.1.2. Variability in Service Delivery

The variability in service delivery is another critical issue stemming from inconsistent service standards. Private elderly care institutions often differ significantly in the types and quality of services they offer, ranging from basic care to more comprehensive medical and rehabilitation services. A report by the China National Committee on Aging found that only 40% of private institutions met the national standards for service delivery, with rural institutions lagging far behind their urban counterparts. This variability is exacerbated by the lack of trained professionals and inadequate infrastructure, particularly in

less developed regions. As a result, elderly residents in these areas often receive substandard care, which negatively impacts their overall well-being.

3.2. Staffing Challenges

3.2.1. Shortages of Qualified Caregivers

The shortage of qualified caregivers is a pervasive issue in private elderly care institutions across China. Only 30% of caregivers in these institutions have received formal training in elderly care [12]. This lack of training not only affects the quality of care but also limits the types of services that can be offered. The study further highlights that the emotional and psychological needs of the elderly are often neglected due to the caregivers' limited understanding of these aspects of care. This shortage is particularly acute in rural areas, where the migration of younger populations to urban centers has left a significant gap in the labor market.

3.2.2. High Turnover Rates and Burnout

High turnover rates and caregiver burnout are additional challenges that exacerbate staffing shortages. The demanding nature of caregiving work, coupled with low wages and limited career advancement opportunities, contributes to high turnover rates in private elderly care institutions [5]. This constant turnover not only disrupts the continuity of care but also places additional strain on remaining staff, leading to burnout. The study suggests that improving working conditions and offering competitive salaries could help mitigate these issues, thereby enhancing the overall quality of care.

3.3. Financial Constraints

3.3.1. High Operational Costs

Financial constraints are a significant barrier to improving service quality in private elderly care institutions. High operational costs, including expenses related to staffing, infrastructure, and medical supplies, often strain the budgets of these institutions. According to a report by the China Development Research Foundation, many private institutions operate on thin profit margins, making it difficult to invest in quality improvement initiatives [6]. This financial strain is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where lower occupancy rates and limited government subsidies further exacerbate the problem.

3.3.2. Limited Access to Funding and Subsidies

Limited access to funding and subsidies is another critical financial challenge. While the central government has introduced various funding programs to support elderly care services, the distribution of these funds is often uneven. Urban institutions are more likely to receive government subsidies compared to their rural counterparts. This disparity in funding limits the ability of rural institutions to invest in necessary infrastructure and training programs, thereby perpetuating the gap in service quality between urban and rural areas [6].

3.4. Regulatory and Policy Gaps

3.4.1. Weak Enforcement of Quality Standards

Weak enforcement of quality standards is a significant regulatory challenge that affects the quality of services in private elderly care institutions. Despite the existence of national standards for elderly care, enforcement is often lax, particularly in rural areas. Only 20% of private institutions in rural areas met the national standards for service quality, compared to 60% in urban areas [10]. This weak enforcement is partly due to the lack of regulatory oversight and the limited capacity of local governments to monitor and enforce compliance. Strengthening regulatory frameworks and improving enforcement

mechanisms are essential steps toward ensuring consistent service quality across all regions.

3.4.2. Fragmented Policy Framework

The fragmented policy framework governing private elderly care institutions in China is a significant barrier to improving service quality. Despite the central government's efforts to establish comprehensive policies for elderly care, the implementation and enforcement of these policies often vary widely across regions due to the decentralized nature of China's administrative system. This fragmentation results in inconsistent standards, unequal resource distribution, and a lack of accountability, ultimately undermining the quality of care provided by private institutions.

One of the key issues is the lack of coordination between national and local policies. While the central government has introduced overarching guidelines, such as the "Healthy China 2030" initiative, local governments often lack the resources or capacity to implement these policies effectively.

4. Strategic Reflections and Recommendations

4.1. Policy Reforms and Government Support

4.1.1. Strengthening Regulatory Frameworks

To address the inconsistent service standards and fragmented policy framework in private elderly care institutions, strengthening regulatory frameworks is essential. The Chinese government must establish clear, enforceable national standards for service quality, infrastructure, and staffing requirements. Standardized regulations can significantly improve service consistency and accountability across institutions. Additionally, local governments should be empowered with the resources and authority to enforce these standards effectively, particularly in rural areas where oversight is often lacking [15]. Regular inspections and transparent reporting mechanisms can further ensure compliance and foster trust among stakeholders.

4.1.2. Increasing Financial Subsidies and Incentives

Financial constraints are a major barrier to improving service quality in private elderly care institutions. To address this, the government should increase financial subsidies and incentives, particularly for institutions in underserved rural areas. Targeted funding can help smaller institutions invest in infrastructure, staff training, and advanced technologies. Tax incentives and low-interest loans could also encourage private investment in the sector, enabling institutions to expand their services and improve care quality. By reducing the financial burden on private operators, these measures can create a more sustainable and equitable elderly care system.

4.2. Enhancing Human Resources

4.2.1. Training and Certification Programs

The shortage of qualified caregivers is a critical issue that undermines service quality in private elderly care institutions. Implementing comprehensive training and certification programs is essential to address this gap. Caregivers with formal training are better equipped to meet the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of elderly residents. The government, in collaboration with educational institutions, should develop standardized training curricula and certification requirements for caregivers. Additionally, ongoing professional development programs can help caregivers stay updated on best practices and emerging technologies, further enhancing service quality.

4.2.2. Improving Working Conditions and Salaries

High turnover rates and caregiver burnout are significant challenges that stem from poor working conditions and low salaries. To retain skilled caregivers, private institutions must improve working conditions and offer competitive salaries. Better remuneration, career advancement opportunities, and supportive work environments can reduce turnover rates and improve job satisfaction. Government subsidies could also be used to supplement caregiver salaries, particularly in rural areas where financial resources are limited. By addressing these issues, institutions can build a more stable and motivated workforce, ultimately improving the quality of care.

4.3. Leveraging Technology

4.3.1. Smart Elderly Care Solutions

The integration of technology, such as smart elderly care solutions, can significantly enhance service quality in private institutions. Smart devices, including wearable health monitors and automated medication dispensers, can improve the safety and independence of elderly residents. Institutions adopting smart technologies reported higher resident satisfaction and reduced operational costs. The government should provide funding and technical support to help institutions, particularly in rural areas, adopt these technologies. Additionally, partnerships with technology companies can facilitate the development of affordable and user-friendly solutions tailored to the needs of elderly care.

4.3.2. Telemedicine and Remote Monitoring

Telemedicine and remote monitoring are powerful tools for improving access to medical care in private elderly care institutions. These technologies enable real-time consultations with healthcare professionals and continuous monitoring of residents' health conditions. Telemedicine can reduce the need for hospital visits and improve the timely detection of health issues. The government should promote the adoption of telemedicine by providing subsidies for equipment and training. Furthermore, integrating telemedicine into national healthcare policies can ensure its widespread implementation, benefiting both urban and rural institutions.

4.4. Raising Public Awareness and Changing Perceptions

4.4.1. Campaigns to Reduce Stigma

Negative perceptions and stigma surrounding elderly care institutions often deter families from seeking professional care for their elderly members. Public awareness campaigns can help reduce this stigma by highlighting the benefits of professional care and showcasing success stories from private institutions. Media campaigns and community outreach programs can effectively change public attitudes. These campaigns should emphasize the importance of quality elderly care and the role of private institutions in supporting families and improving the well-being of elderly individuals.

4.4.2. Encouraging Community Involvement

Community involvement is crucial for fostering a supportive environment for elderly care. Private institutions should collaborate with local communities to create volunteer programs and intergenerational activities that promote social engagement among elderly residents. Community-based initiatives can enhance the emotional and psychological well-being of elderly individuals while reducing the burden on caregivers. The government should encourage such collaborations by providing funding and recognition for community-driven projects. By fostering stronger ties between institutions and communities, these efforts can create a more inclusive and supportive elderly care ecosystem.

4.5. *Using Policies to Reduce Regional Disparities*

4.5.1. Government Optimization Service Framework

To address the significant regional disparities in service quality among private elderly care institutions in China, targeted strategies must be implemented to ensure equitable access to high-quality care across urban and rural areas. First, the government should prioritize the development of a unified regulatory framework that establishes clear, enforceable standards for service quality, infrastructure, and staffing. This framework should be tailored to address the unique challenges faced by rural institutions, such as limited resources and weaker regulatory oversight. Standardized protocols can significantly improve service consistency and accountability, particularly in underserved regions. Additionally, increased financial subsidies and incentives should be directed toward rural institutions to help them meet these standards. Targeted funding can enable rural institutions to invest in infrastructure upgrades, staff training, and advanced technologies, thereby narrowing the quality gap with urban institutions.

4.5.2. Strengthen Investment in Technical Services

Enhancing human resources and leveraging technology are critical strategies for improving service quality in rural areas. Training and certification programs should be expanded to address the shortage of qualified caregivers in rural regions. Caregivers with formal training are better equipped to meet the diverse needs of elderly residents, including medical, emotional, and psychological support. Furthermore, the adoption of technology, such as telemedicine and smart elderly care solutions, can bridge the gap in service delivery between urban and rural areas. Telemedicine significantly improves access to medical care in rural institutions, reducing the need for hospital visits and enhancing the overall quality of care [15]. By investing in human capital and technology, rural institutions can overcome resource limitations and provide services that meet the standards of their urban counterparts.

5. Conclusion

The quality of services provided by private elderly care institutions in China is a critical issue that demands urgent attention as the country faces a rapidly aging population. This paper has examined the current state of service quality, identified key challenges, and proposed actionable recommendations to address these issues. Despite the significant progress made in expanding elderly care services, private institutions continue to face numerous obstacles, including inconsistent service standards, staffing shortages, financial constraints, and regulatory gaps. These challenges are further exacerbated by regional disparities, with rural areas often lagging behind urban centers in terms of infrastructure, resources, and service quality.

One of the most pressing issues is the lack of uniform quality metrics and standardized service protocols, which leads to variability in service delivery across institutions. This inconsistency undermines the overall quality of care and creates disparities in the experiences of elderly residents. Additionally, the shortage of qualified caregivers and high turnover rates due to poor working conditions and low salaries further compromise service quality. Financial constraints, particularly in rural areas, limit the ability of private institutions to invest in necessary infrastructure and training programs, perpetuating the gap between urban and rural service quality. Weak enforcement of regulatory standards and a fragmented policy framework further hinder efforts to improve service quality.

To address these challenges, this paper proposes a multifaceted approach that includes policy reforms, enhanced human resource management, technological integration, and public awareness campaigns. Strengthening regulatory frameworks and increasing financial subsidies can provide a solid foundation for improving service quality. Enhancing human resources through training programs and better working conditions can address staffing shortages and improve caregiver retention. Leveraging technology, such as

smart elderly care solutions and telemedicine, can enhance service delivery and operational efficiency. Finally, raising public awareness and encouraging community involvement can reduce stigma and foster a more supportive environment for elderly care.

Looking ahead, the future of private elderly care in China depends on the collective efforts of the government, private sector, and society at large. Policymakers must prioritize the development of a unified regulatory framework and ensure equitable resource distribution. Private institutions must embrace innovation and invest in human capital to meet the growing demand for high-quality care. At the same time, society must work to change perceptions of elderly care and promote a culture of respect and support for the elderly. By addressing these challenges and implementing the proposed recommendations, China can build a more sustainable and inclusive elderly care system that meets the needs of its aging population.

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