

Study on the Current Situation of the Mental Health Service System in Urban and Rural Communities

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Abstract: The study aims to analyze the current status of the mental health service system in urban and rural communities in China and to propose suggestions for the existing problems. Using literature review methods, the study found that the main challenges faced by the system are: a lack of awareness of mental health among the majority of residents, a shortage of professionals, a low service coverage rate, uneven regional development, and a misalignment between service supply and demand. In view of these issues, this study suggests improvements from the following five aspects: intensifying the popularization and publicity of mental health services, building a professional talent pool, increasing financial support, forming a mental health service theoretical system that conforms to China's national conditions, and providing comprehensive and diversified mental health services for different resident groups. Through these measures, it is hoped to provide practical guidance and theoretical references for the perfection of China's community mental health service system.

1. Introduction

In the post-pandemic era, people face pressures from various aspects due to the intense competitive environment and fast-paced life. In recent years, China has placed more emphasis on the mental health of its citizens. In the 19th National Congress report, the Party proposed to establish a stronger social psychological service system to nurture a healthy social mindset. The 20th National Congress report then reaffirmed the promotion of building a Healthy China, emphasizing the importance of mental health and mental hygiene^[1]. Mental health is not only key to individual well-being but also a cornerstone for social stability and long-term development. To address these challenges, a community mental health service system based on psychological theories and following the laws of psychological development was established. This system is managed by professional institutions and personnel, providing services such as psychological problem detection, mental health maintenance, and improving psychological quality. It encompasses management and supervision, psychological training, counseling, therapy, and rehabilitation^[2]. The quality and development status of the system's services are directly related to the mental health level of the public. Therefore, community mental health services not only serve as an effective means of psychological intervention but also play a crucial role in ensuring the psychological well-being of the people and promoting social harmony.

2. Problems and Causes of China's Community Mental Health Service System

Many scholars have conducted empirical studies on the understanding and demand of urban and rural residents for community mental health services, as well as the implementation of these services. By analyzing existing research literature, several issues in the current community mental health service system have been identified.

2.1. Insufficient understanding of mental health among residents

According to a survey by Fang Fang and others, only 13% of the residents have a deep understanding of community mental health services, 78% have a slight understanding, and 9% have no understanding at all^[3]. This indicates that although the majority of residents have heard about mental health services, their actual understanding is superficial. Chen Sha's research further revealed that 75.6% of the residents believe it is necessary to carry out community mental health services^[4]. However, a survey by Song Xiuli shows that more than half of the residents believe that the emergence of mental illnesses is due to an individual's lack of resilience^[5], reflecting a common misconception about the causes of mental disorders. Regarding attitudes towards psychological counseling, 59.27% of residents said they would not seek help, mainly because of concerns about social prejudice and being looked down upon, with only 26.16% of residents saying they don't care about others' opinions^[4]. These figures highlight a phenomenon: while residents recognize the importance of mental health services, social stigma, concerns about personal privacy, and a lack of knowledge about mental health act as significant barriers when actually seeking help.

Several factors contribute to this contradiction: Firstly, residents' understanding of mental health remains superficial, lacking in-depth knowledge and correct information. Secondly, there is stigmatization of mental health in society, causing residents to feel ashamed or worried when facing psychological issues. Furthermore, the promotion of community mental health services hasn't achieved the desired outcome, failing to effectively spread mental health knowledge and reduce the social stigma associated with psychological counseling.

2.2. Shortage of professional personnel

In Ma Hanqiao's research, an analysis of the composition and training of community mental health service staff in places like Shenzhen, Wuhan, Beijing, and Shanghai revealed that there are relatively few service staff with a background in psychology. Furthermore, many of them also have other roles, such as outpatient and administrative duties, with very few exclusively focusing on mental health services. Additionally, the professional backgrounds of these service personnel are mainly in clinical and nursing specialties, and nearly half of them haven't received formal education or training in psychology^[5]. Further research, like that by Xu Li and others, based on a survey of 200 communities in Sichuan province, showed that none of the communities had set up a dedicated position for psychological counseling. Even part-time professionals in this area are very rare^[6-7], indicating a gap in psychological health services within community services.

Mental health services require practitioners to have not only solid theoretical knowledge but also extensive practical experience and good psychological qualities. However, the actual number of certified psychological counselors in China is less than one-tenth of that in developed countries^[11]. Although since 2002, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security has issued about 1.07 million Level 3 or Level 2 psychological counselor qualification certificates, currently only 30,000 to 40,000 people are actually working in the psychological counseling industry full-time or part-time^[8]. These figures highlight the shortage of professional talent in mental health services in China, which has become a major bottleneck restricting the development of community mental health

services.

The causes of this issue can be attributed to the following: Firstly, China's policies for training and introducing mental health service personnel are relatively lagging, resulting in a demand-supply mismatch of professional talent. Secondly, existing community practitioners generally lack basic mental health knowledge, and there is no professional on-the-job training system in the community. Additionally, there might be insufficient societal understanding of mental health services, limited investment, and the social status of mental health service professions isn't high, with compensation packages that aren't attractive enough to draw talent.

2.3. Low Coverage Rate of Community Mental Health Services

Xu Li's survey of 200 communities in Sichuan province showed that 71% of the communities did not have a psychological counseling room. Moreover, in communities that did have such rooms, 37.9% were idle. Additionally, 60.5% of the communities had never offered mental health services^[6].

The survey reveals that, in terms of infrastructure, most communities do not have dedicated psychological counseling rooms, lack specialized equipment, and lack dedicated spaces for counseling. Communities often have to temporarily use offices or meeting rooms for health service activities, which are inadequate for psychological services. Regarding funding, there's no specific financial support from the government level, leading to financial constraints for community mental health services. This results in the lack of professional equipment and consultation spaces. Due to these limitations, many community service institutions either overlook or are passive about launching mental health service programs, leaving them superficial without effective implementation.

2.4. Uneven Regional Development

Differences in economic development and resource allocation lead to regional disparities in the quality of community mental health services. Eastern areas, due to their more advanced economies, have relatively mature community mental health services. Cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou have already launched mental health services in several communities. In stark contrast, central and western regions, especially rural areas, lack the necessary financial and material support. They also lack resource-sharing and cooperative communication mechanisms, resulting in stagnation in community mental health services^[9]. Xu Li's research pointed out that most communities see financial shortfalls as the primary obstacle to the development of mental health services^[6]. At present, there's no dedicated funding at the governmental level to specifically support community mental health services, forcing communities to rely on limited other funds.

Comparing with the mature community mental health service systems in Western countries, China started relatively late in this area. Although the government has begun to pay more attention to the issue and has introduced some policies, there is still a lot of room for improvement in the service system and institutional construction^[10]. Western systems usually emphasize state-led initiatives and broad societal participation. In contrast, China's policy-making is not sufficiently specific, lacks strong policy and legal safeguards, and there's insufficient inter-departmental collaboration. All these factors collectively constrain the development of community mental health services^[11].

Thus, to achieve balanced development of community mental health services, it's essential to increase funding, clarify policy direction, strengthen inter-departmental cooperation, and learn from international experiences to construct a mental health service system suitable for China's national conditions.

2.5. Mismatch of Service Supply and Demand

Wang Yao conducted a questionnaire survey on the psychological service needs of community residents in Shijiazhuang. The results showed that residents have diverse needs for community psychological services. Over 80% of residents hope that the community can offer psychological services related to interpersonal relationships, adolescent psychology, elderly psychology, and family relationships. Additionally, 73.48% of residents hope that the community can provide psychological services related to emotions and stress regulation. Looking at the content of the community mental health services offered, the community mainly focuses on special groups with psychological behavioral abnormalities and sudden crisis events^[12]. Routine psychological services for all community residents are significantly lacking, and the services neither meet the specificity nor the generality that residents expect. Potential causes for this problem include: firstly, inadequate resource allocation, where communities lack the necessary funds and professionals to provide broader services; secondly, a shortage of professional talents, with a lack of qualified mental health professionals, leading to limited service content. Lastly, there's a singular service strategy where communities may place too much emphasis on specific issues or groups, overlooking the general mental health needs.

The existence of these issues indicates that, while residents have a broad and urgent demand for mental health services, shortcomings in service content, professional talent allocation, and widespread promotion are still key factors affecting service outcomes. It necessitates comprehensive optimization and improvement of the existing service system from various aspects such as policy, funding, and talent training.

3. Countermeasures for Building a Community Mental Health Service System

After discussing the current status, existing problems, and causes of the community mental health service system in China, this article will focus on proposing countermeasures from five aspects: community propaganda work, talent development, financial support, theoretical system, and service model. These measures aim to effectively solve the existing problems, compensate for the shortcomings of the service system, and promote the development of the community mental health service system in a more mature and systematic direction.

3.1. Strengthening the Publicity Work of Mental Health Services

To enhance community residents' awareness of mental health and service coverage, the following measures can be taken:

Online publicity strategy: Communities should fully utilize the advantages of digital media, utilize the information push function of WeChat official accounts, and regularly publish mental health-related content such as self-assessment tools and coping strategies to enhance residents' cognition of their psychological state. At the same time, communities can produce and share psychological educational short films on popular short video platforms such as Douyin and Kuaishou. By using lively and interesting storylines, they can eliminate the public's misunderstandings and prejudices about psychological issues, creating a more open and supportive environment.

Offline promotional activities: Communities should also regularly hold mental health lectures, inviting professional psychologists to provide in-depth explanations on essential mental health topics, helping residents identify and address psychological problems. Furthermore, printing mental health promotional brochures and distributing them through community activities can effectively expand the dissemination of mental health knowledge. Communities can also set up dedicated

columns for mental health knowledge in conspicuous public areas, updating the latest mental health information in real time, and increasing residents' attention to psychological issues.

These measures will help establish a more comprehensive mental health education and publicity system, thereby promoting the overall improvement of residents' mental health levels, encouraging residents to actively seek and accept psychological assistance. In this way, community psychological services will become more humanized, professional, and more able to meet the diverse mental health needs of residents.

3.2. Construction of a Professional Talent Team

In foreign countries, the staff of community mental health service centers are generally only allowed to become practitioners in community mental health services after long-term clinical practice, professional training, and obtaining qualification certification. They form professional teams at different levels based on the specific needs of the services provided^[10].

For the construction of China's community mental health service talent team, three aspects can be considered:

Firstly, improve the salary of practitioners. Currently, the salaries of community mental health service personnel are generally not high. By raising salaries and introducing incentive measures, more professionals with a background in psychology can be attracted, especially encouraging recent graduates to enter this field. Secondly, continuous training and supervision should be emphasized. Regular training of existing staff in professional skills, professional ethics, psychological qualities, and knowledge reserves ensures the quality and professionalism of the services. Finally, integrate the power of society to participate in mental health services. In addition to the inherent service staff, communities should leverage the power of all sectors of society, such as by establishing internship bases to attract college students to participate in internships, and also inviting university professors and hospital experts to give lectures and provide free psychological counseling, offering comprehensive services to community residents. Such integrated measures will help establish a more professional and multi-level community mental health service talent system.

3.3. Increase Financial Support

International experience shows that in the construction of community mental health services, the government plays a crucial role, especially in financial support and the establishment of a legal framework. Taking Australia as an example, since the implementation of the "Mental Health Act" in 1986, the government not only directly manages community mental health centers but also ensures services lean towards the community, significantly improving the coverage and quality of professional medical services. Innovative strategies in Sweden since the 1970s and the UK's "Mental Health Act" in 1983, followed by reforms to mental health institutions, reflect the government's active role in promoting community mental health services^[10].

There is a prominent issue of lack of funds in this field in China, which restricts the expansion and improvement of services. Therefore, referring to the practices of Western countries, the Chinese government needs to increase financial inputs and provide stable financial support for community mental health services. This involves equipping service centers with necessary hardware facilities, purchasing professional psychological assessment tools and equipment to ensure the professionalism and efficiency of services. At the same time, the government should consider including community mental health services in the medical insurance system, alleviate residents' financial pressures, and support the continuous development of this field through special funds, promoting the improvement and upgrade of the community mental health service system.

3.4. Develop a Scientific Theoretical System Suitable for China's National Conditions

The government should actively advocate and support experts and scholars to conduct in-depth research in the field of community mental health services, promoting theoretical innovation to guide practice. The United States, as a pioneer in community mental health services, established an advanced service system as early as 1963 with the "Community Mental Health Centers Act". Subsequently, countries such as Australia and Canada have also formed their unique and mature community mental health service systems^[1], which are successful models that China can refer to. Although community mental health services in China started late, there has been significant progress, such as the establishment of the first government-led community mental health service center in Karamay, Xinjiang, in 2004. In light of this^[1], China needs to combine its own national conditions, learn from the effective theories and practices of mature foreign systems, and construct a community mental health service theoretical system tailored to China's characteristics. Such a theoretical system can guide the practice of community mental health services towards professionalism, ensuring the scientific and practical nature of the service model to meet the growing public mental health needs.

3.5. Provide Comprehensive and Diverse Mental Health Services for Different Residents

Overseas community mental health services cover various levels, aiming to provide assistance to all residents, not just specific groups. This trend of service popularization is reflected in addressing a range of common psychological issues in modern society, such as postnatal psychology, youth issues, geriatric psychology, stress management, and psychological counseling for drug users. These services permeate every aspect of daily life. China's communities should also adopt a similar model in mental health services. Instead of only focusing on specific groups or emergencies, communities should conduct in-depth research to understand the overall situation of residents and the needs of different groups. They should provide professional psychological counseling for common issues such as interpersonal relationships, education, and job stress. In terms of service forms, traditional single models should be abandoned, and diverse service forms should be developed in combination with regional characteristics. Services can be offered through thematic lectures, group counseling, exchange activities, knowledge salons, psychological evaluations, etc., providing tailor-made services for residents of different ages and with different psychological needs. This will meet their actual needs and enhance the popularity and effectiveness of mental health services.

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