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Taiwanese Home Care Services Facing Rapidly Aging Population

Discussion

Laborers Shortage of Home Care Service in Taiwan

Due to the low rate of caregivers and the low professionalism of home care service laborers, the home care system for elders in Taiwan is lacking laborers.

First of all, the rate of caregivers (including family members and home care service laborers) has declined while the elders' rate has increased. According to a journal article written by Yi-Yin Lin and Chin-Shan Huang (2016), Taiwan has one of the fastest-aging populations in the world. As people age, they require more care, which increases the demand for caregivers. The growth rates of the elderly and young populations are different. The lower birth rate and longer living time of elders due to medical advances are leading Taiwan to a super-aged society in about 2 years, as mentioned in the background. Therefore, lots of families don't have enough younger members or even younger generations to take care of the elders. According to the National Development Council (2022), a policy-planning office of the Executive Yuan of Taiwan, in 2022, every 4.0 working-age population will bear 1 elderly population, and by 2070, it will drop to every 1.1, which means that family responsibilities for a working-age population in a family will be higher, and hence, people will rely more on home care service laborers. On the other hand, the Taiwanese home-care system has relatively bad treatment, which has narrowed the number of people that are willing to enter this industry. Joe Henley, a freelance

writer in Taipei that focuses on culture, human rights, etc., wrote a journal article on caregivers' treatment in Taiwan and mentioned the caregivers' grievances reflected at a public hearing on August 6, 2021:

"Representatives of the caregivers aired their grievances, such as lack of time off, pay below the nation's minimum wage, and having to do work outside their job description. Attempting to deflect concerns, an MOL official argued that for every tale of woe from a caregiver, he had heard similar stories of bad experiences suffered by employers".

Home care service laborers in Taiwan are typically paid low wages and lack vacation hours, which makes it difficult to attract and retain workers. Without people entering this industry and younger generations taking the spot, the rate of caregivers will decrease even more, the elderly rate will remain high, and the gap between them will grow as well.

Second, home care service laborers have low professionalism, so they have relatively low career development opportunities in Taiwan, and this will not become people's first choice of career. Despite there being standardized training and certification programs for home care service laborers in Taiwan, it is not a requirement for pursuing this job. Zheng Fen Chen (2019), a professor at the Department of Long-term Care at the National Taipei University of Nursing and Health Science, and Hui Chun Yang, a master of social welfare at the National Chung Cheng University, mentioned in their research that having a professional license is not necessary for employment as a caregiver, it is up to the individual to decide whether to take the test in order to earn a level C technician certificate (one of the levels of the National Technician Skills Test in Taiwan), while the government or employers (individuals or home service units) only adopt an encouraging attitude. Thus, being a home care service laborer is often seen as a low-skilled job, and society still has "noble or humble" distinctions about occupations which limit their earning

potential and job security, and may also impact their overall job satisfaction, leading to low incentive for workers to stay in the field and gain experience.

Funding Problems of Both Individuals and the Government

Both the Taiwanese government and individuals are facing funding problems. The lack of home care service laborers in Taiwan has led to an increase in the amount, and people are more willing to choose lower foreign caregivers than government resources or domestic caregivers.

Population aging in Taiwan has become an important social issue in recent years. The government passed the "Long-Term Care Plan 2.0" (LTC2.0) in September 2016. In addition to continuing the long-term care services provided in the past, it also hopes to establish a community-based long-term care system. Establish a care management system through medical care and support for family care capabilities. However, four years after the policy was implemented, the trend of Taiwan's reliance on foreign caregivers has not decreased but increased, and the number of people According to the Ministry of Labor's Foreign Workers Center and Employment Survey Report in 2019, 32.8% of domestic employers had experience in hiring foreign domestic care workers before hiring them, and 82.3% did not continue to employ them because of “economic burden considerations”.

Ting Fang Xiao (2019), a reporter from Business Today, She mentioned in the report that according to the Ministry of Health and Welfare’s trial calculation of the differences in different long-term care programs, the calculation is based on the highest level of disability:

Option 1: hire foreign care workers, 29,000 NTD/month;

Option 2: use long-term care 2.0 services, 69,641 NTD/month;

Option 3: Hiring domestic care workers, 75,000 NTD/month.

The implication is that whether you choose LTC2.0 resources or hire domestic caregivers, the cost you pay is 2-3 times higher than that of foreign workers. This shows that Taiwan's domestic services are beyond the affordable range. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, by 2070, it will drop to every 1.1 (National Development Council) people tend to hire home care service laborers to take care of elders. Individuals may not have sufficient income to pay for home care services, especially if they require more intensive care or services on a long-term basis. The high number of seniors who need care in the family makes this service unaffordable for many households.

Moreover, there's a lack of subsidies provided by the Taiwanese government to individuals or families who need home-care services and financial support from the government. While the government provides subsidies for home care services through its LTC2.0, not all individuals may be eligible for these subsidies. The application standards for subsidies are relatively high, and the process and methods are too complicated.

Taiwan uses Activities of daily livings (ADLs) Taiwan commonly used Barthel scale:

Mildly disabled: 1 to 2 ADLs disabled

Moderately disabled: 3 to 4 ADLs disabled

Severely disabled: disabled persons with 5 or more ADLs

The maximum annual subsidy for disability levels 2-6 is 32,340 NTD, and the maximum annual subsidy for 7-8 levels is 48,510 NTD (第一輔具). However, the lowest monthly salary of a full-time home care worker that the Ministry of Health and Welfare set is at least 32,000 NTD. Although there are subsidies, the maximum amount is only approximately 20%, which doesn't

help too much for the families who really need help. In fact, the government is not deliberately not providing better subsidies. "According to statistics, the sources and uses of long-term care funds from 2017 to 2021 show that long-term care funds have grown from 1.354 billion NTD in 2017 to 49.17 billion NTD in 2021, an increase of 36 times. The Budget Center of the Legislative Yuan's 2021 'Overall Assessment Report on the Central Government's General Budget' also pointed out that the long-term care fund has been unable to make ends meet this year, and it is estimated that the fund will be short of more than 10 billion NTD next year, and it is expected to go bankrupt in three years" (Xiao, 2020). This further reflects that the government's funds cannot provide more subsidy funds.

The Uneven Distribution of Resources Between Rural and Urban

The Taiwanese government's uneven distribution of resources have impacted the home care system in Taiwan. The Taiwanese government allocates the resources unevenly. "In remote rural areas, the lack of resources and manpower has always been a dilemma that is difficult to break through. There are few long-term care personnel willing to work in remote rural areas. Even if there are people, retention is another problem. Therefore, it is often said that the services provided are not enough. Supplying people's needs.' The situation" (Wang, 2018). The government invests more resources in urban areas, it may be more difficult for rural areas to provide high-quality home care services due to a lack of funding and resources. This could result in disparities in the availability and quality of home care services between urban and rural areas.

The rural areas will face the problem of disconnection of information and resources with urban areas. Den Xin Liang (2013), Professor of Department of Statistics and Informatics, Fu Jen Catholic University research on "Usage of Smart Devices by People Over 50 Years Old" mentioned:

“The Internet usage rate of people aged 50 and above is still relatively low. In the past three years from 2010 to 2012, the Internet access rate of people aged 50 and above stagnated between 31.2% and 33.6%, while the Internet rate of people under 50 years old increased from 89.0% to 95.1%, an increase of about 6.1 percentage points, said In recent years, the development of new digital technologies and the promotion of related policies have driven the Internet access rate of people under the age of 50, but there is no obvious effect on people over the age of 50 (including)”

Elders in the rural areas will have less opportunity to get information immediately, and some elders without younger generations can find this problem severer. Without information, they are unable to apply for relevant service and help they need.

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