

Analysis of the Dilemma of Re-employment of Low-age Elderly People and Reflections on Countermeasures--Based on the Perspective of Social Support Theory

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Abstract: As the degree of aging in China continues to deepen and the life expectancy per capita increases, using human resources for the elderly has become an important means of releasing the demographic dividend. Based on the social support theory, this paper analyses from the perspectives of individuals, governments, and employers, and concludes that the main reasons for the plight of the elderly in re-employment are the irregularities in the flexible labor market and the lack of professional service institutions at the governmental level, the insufficient excavation of re-employment work at the community level, and the age discrimination in employment and the avoidance of liability for work-related injuries at the enterprise level. Based on this, we propose that the community should play a pivotal role, and the government should adopt differentiated measures to help ease the plight of the elderly in re-entering the workforce.

Keywords: Low-age Seniors, Re-employment of Seniors, Social Support

1. Research background

The degree of aging in China continues to deepen, with the elderly population aged 60 years and over accounting for 18.7 percent of the total population as of 2020, 5.44 percent higher than the data from the sixth population census. For reasons such as seeking personal and social value to play a skill, to meet the higher level of consumer demand, the elderly after retirement re-employment will be strong. In the elderly population dependency ratio is rising, and most of the elderly have the ability and willingness to re-employment of the reality of the background, the use of low-age elderly manpower resources become an important way to release the demographic dividend. However, hot news such as “60-year-old courier sorter died suddenly at work and was refused to recognize work injury”. also show that The re-employment of the elderly faces a lot of problems and contradictions, such as protection of rights and interests, low choices, and conflicting family opinions, which must be pondered and urgently solved by all sectors of society.

2. Theory of Social Support

Social support was first introduced in the field of psychiatry in the 1970s and has since been gradually introduced in various fields. Mu Guangzong^[1] suggests that social support for groups in need includes two kinds, one is social support, which comes from the government, community, and enterprises; and the other is informal support, which mainly comes from relatives, neighbors, and so on. This study combines the perspective of social support theory to view the low-aged elderly group facing the plight of re-employment as a whole in need of social support. Based on the above definition, at the level of social support, the government, community, and enterprises are taken as the formal support level, and individuals and families are categorized as the informal support level. From both formal and informal support levels, the causes of the re-employment dilemma of the under-aged elderly are explored, and countermeasures are proposed.

3. Current status of the re-employment plight of older persons

3.1 Polarisation of employment

At present, there is a polarization in the form of re-employment for the elderly in China, except for a small number of professionals and technicians in specific industries who are rehired after retirement at high salaries, most of whom are concentrated in posts with no technical requirements, low salaries, and high physical requirements. Of the total elderly employed population, 66.14 percent of those aged 60 or over are in the primary sector, 6.59 percent are in the manufacturing sector, and 6.28 percent are in the wholesale and retail sectors.

3.2 Narrow channels for seeking help

In the process of re-employment, it is difficult to protect the unusual rights and interests of the elderly, and it is difficult to support compensation for work-related injuries. On the one hand, the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly lacks provisions specifically related to the re-employment of the elderly. Other existing laws and regulations in China do not regulate the legal rights and interests of the elderly in secondary employment after retirement, nor do they contain specific implementation rules to promote the employment of the elderly. When they are re-employed, older persons are not given due protection because they have exceeded the legal retirement age and are not covered by the Labour Contract Law.

3.3 misperceptions limit

At the conceptual level, there are widespread misconceptions in society about the re-employment of the elderly: first, the “wasteful old-age theory”, which holds that the elderly who have reached retirement age have outdated knowledge and cannot update their knowledge and innovate and that the elderly are viewed as objects to be provided for rather than as an important group that participates in socio-economic development and shares in the fruits of social development. The second is the “burden theory”, which holds that retirees are becoming weaker and weaker and that they are at high risk of being employed. Third, the “employment squeeze theory”, ignoring the frictional unemployment problem of youth, the public generally believes that the lower labor cost and rich working experience of the elderly people are squeezing the employment opportunities of young people. Social misconceptions exclude older persons from re-entering the labor force, limiting the market’s ability to provide more opportunities for older persons.

4. Analysis of factors shaping the re-employment dilemma of the elderly

The number of older persons re-entering the workforce is increasing, and it is undeniable that the slightly lower competitiveness of older persons in the job market, coupled with a gap in the protection of their rights and interests, has further undermined the incentives of older persons to re-enter the workforce, and it is important and urgent to alleviate the plight of older persons in re-entering the workforce. The causes of this problem are not determined by individual factors alone, but rather by a combination of formal and informal levels of social support.

4.1 Formal support

4.1.1 Government

The flexible labor market, which has a large number of older workers, is not regulated. A large number of older persons who are re-employed after retirement have entered the flexible labor market, either actively or passively, due to limited energy and the inability to establish a labor relationship with an enterprise. In the flexible labor market, re-employed older persons face the pain points of job insecurity, lack of social security, and incomplete pay transparency. This is the main reason for the lack of security for re-employed older persons at this stage, which reduces the motivation of re-employed older persons. There is a lack of professional services for the re-employment of the elderly. Re-employment of the elderly involves both work on aging and employment.

4.1.2 Communities

Insufficient efforts are being made to tap into the re-employment aspect of the community. Communities are the most active grass-roots cells, providing the most direct services for older persons. Although communities have a better understanding of the number and living conditions of the elderly within their jurisdiction, the services they provide for the elderly mainly focus on activities such as daycare, meal assistance, health check-ups, and sports and fitness; some communities encourage the younger elderly to participate in volunteer services related to mutual assistance in old-age care, such as time-banking volunteering; and some communities have opened a university for the elderly or skills training services, but most of the courses are leisure and welfare-type courses such as flower arranging, dancing, and calligraphy, which do not match the actual demand for employment.

4.1.3 Enterprises

Age discrimination in employment. Enterprises, as an important part of society, have not yet updated their concepts related to human

resources. Some employers exclude older persons from recruitment, hiring, promotion, and so forth based on age alone, without regard to ability, experience, and performance, ignoring the potential resources of older workers. The prevalence of age discrimination in China's labor market has shut out a large number of older job seekers. Lack of legal awareness and responsibility. According to the current labor laws and regulations, the re-employment of the elderly over 60 years of age does not constitute a legal labor relationship with the employer, but an employment relationship. In practice, however, some enterprises, to avoid the responsibility of the employer, have drawn up more stringent form clauses, or even adopted other modes of co-operation, to disguise the employment relationship.

4.2 Informal support

4.2.1 Household

The need for grandchildren's care limits the re-employment of older persons. As family structures become smaller, the burden of supporting the elderly and raising children becomes heavier for the nuclear generation, and with the trend towards specialization in the division of labor, the demands on work time and energy gradually increase, which in turn leads to less mental attention to parents and an increased need for grandchildren to take care of them. The need for re-employment conflicts with the need to care for grandchildren, and time and energy compete with each other. On this basis, the need for caregiving slows down the pace of re-entry into the labor market. And traditional attitudes have created a sense of shame in families about re-entering the workforce. The traditional concept of "raising children for old age" makes families feel ashamed of the re-employment of the elderly. In the face of the stigmatization of "living to a ripe old age" and "raising children is no defense against old age", families do not support the re-employment of older persons.

4.2.2 Individuals

Lack of cultural skills. Influenced by the factors of the times, most of the elderly are characterized by low cultural levels and insufficient skills, which makes them less competitive in the process of re-employment. Statistical data show that about 29.6% of the elderly in China have not attended school, about 41.5% have primary school education, and about 25.8% have middle and high school education, with a lower overall cultural level ^[2]. Moreover, the digital divide exacerbates the information gap. Digital information technology has penetrated all aspects of life, and employment information is widely disseminated on digital platforms. Elderly people who have difficulty accessing digital products are unable to make use of the state-established talent information website for the elderly to obtain employment information and timely match the demand for labor, and can only find employment through a single offline channel. The digital divide in old age exacerbates the information gap for re-employed older persons, narrowing their access to information.

5. Reflections on countermeasures to the plight of the elderly in re-employment

5.1. Government

Adopting differentiated measures to promote the re-employment of the elderly. Because of its credibility and influence, the government gives the necessary support to the adoption of differentiated measures and the improvement of laws and regulations, as well as to social value orientation, infrastructure construction, and the improvement of laws and regulations, to give full play to the government's leading role in guaranteeing the re-employment of the elderly. Respect the re-employment needs of the elderly, and provide protection and services to those who need re-employment. Older people's circumstances differ, and the degree of acceptance in the job market is characterized by differentiation.

5.2. Communities

Play a pivotal role in the re-employment of the elderly. Communities, as grassroots governance organizations, should play a role in matching information on the talents of the elderly within the community with recruitment information from enterprises outside the community. Re-employment of the elderly is a process of mutual matching between job seekers and employers. The community collects information on the talents of the elderly in the community internally, relies on the Internet to build a talent information database, and docks with the employment service center to smooth employment information and employment resources; externally, it receives information on the positions of enterprises and employment units that have recruitment needs, and matches and docks the information on the demand side and the supply

side, to increase the employment channels for the elderly.

5.3. Enterprises

Adhere to the concept of coexistence and win-win situation. Rationally develop the resources of elderly manpower to achieve the optimal allocation of human resources. Firstly, the concept of intergenerational integration should be incorporated into training and work, so that the old can bring in the new, pass on their work experience, and eliminate the antagonistic notion of the elderly crowding out the young people's work opportunities;

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