

# *A study on the intervention path of community work on the spiritual needs of the elderly living alone*

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**Abstract:** The spiritual needs of elderly individuals living alone in the community are significant and varied, including social interaction, skill enhancement, leisure activities, and self-worth. As the aging population grows, community care for the elderly has become a crucial part of the service system. However, many communities lack infrastructure, resource integration, and people's participation. Some have not fully embraced the concept of community aging. Government involvement in community affairs is high, financial support for the elderly is insufficient, and services often overlook this demographic. These services primarily target economically disadvantaged older persons, leading to unclear community service positioning. Additionally, this community has abundant resources for the elderly and excels in areas like spiritual comfort and financial support. For most communities, promoting aging in place and establishing a support system for solitary elderly should be a focus. This study aims to explore the role of community support in aging in place, starting from existing resources and using the social support system framework. The goal is to address the emotional needs of solitary elderly individuals and propose a community support solution for their care.

## **1. Research background**

A 2015 survey revealed that over 50% of elderly are either empty nesters or live alone, with numbers rising. These seniors face economic, care, and emotional challenges, especially lacking social integration to access support. This study aims to explore community work strategies to address their needs, identify useful resources, and find effective interventions for sustainable support.

## **2. Resources for Supporting the Spiritual Needs of Elderly People Living Alone**

Studies show that solo seniors in communities have significant spiritual needs, including emotional support and companionship desires. Men often seek companionship, while women prefer living with children for economic reasons and desire more love and care from them. Seniors have broad needs in socializing, learning, recreation, and value realization.

With aging populations accelerating, community care is vital but lacks infrastructure, resource coordination, and resident engagement. Some communities lack awareness of elderly care, and the

government overly intervenes, underfunding and neglecting elder services.

## **2.1. Family support**

The study found that “there is a certain link between the frequency of family visits and the loneliness of the elderly, the higher the frequency of joining the contact, the higher the satisfaction of the elderly with their lives, and the more scarce the family contact and interaction, the stronger the loneliness of the elderly.”<sup>[1]</sup>In today's society, children's filial piety for the elderly form, more in the material and economic level of support, for the elderly mental and emotional attention is insufficient, the elderly because of long-term can not talk, can only hold back, depressed, withdrawn character. There is a lack of communication between children and parents, and in the face of the problem of remarriage in old age, children often reject the idea of remarriage in old age because of their level of understanding, ideological concepts and personal interests. In addition, some of the elderly living alone have almost no support from their relatives, and those living alone without children have no support from their families and lack strong financial and elderly services.

## **2.2. Peers and older people's own support**

“Friends are a key emotional support for seniors through work and social contacts, with peer understanding helping solo elders find happiness.”<sup>[2]</sup>These seniors actively participate in community activities. Cantor's hierarchical model suggests “support seeking starts with close relationships like spouse and children, followed by neighbors friends, and formal organizations.”<sup>[3]</sup>However, seniors rarely seek help from neighbors, friends, or formal organizations when facing difficulties, opting mostly for children's support. This reluctance is tied to Chinese culture emphasizing family and privacy, discouraging help from "strangers" and leading to indifference towards community support.

## **3. Intervention Paths for the Spiritual Needs of the Elderly Living Alone**

### **3.1. Community's own resources support system intervention**

Elderly individuals living alone have diverse spiritual needs, including cultural activities, sports, social interaction, self-realization, and companionship. To address these, professional social workers should implement case management, establish visitation systems, and actively engage with the elderly. Social workers should also organize regular community activities using local resources, encouraging participation of isolated elders to foster a sense of community belonging. Additionally, social workers can combat ageism and promote respect for the elderly through educational campaigns, enhancing their mental health and self-esteem. Volunteer teams, comprising local students and willing elderly, can be developed to understand and meet the varied needs of isolated seniors effectively. This collaborative approach aims to fulfill the companionship and affirmation needs of lonely elderly individuals, contributing to their holistic well-being.

### **3.2. Family and Peer Support System Intervention**

Community workers should assist solo seniors in strengthening family bonds, maintaining contact with their children, and promoting regular visits. These interactions are crucial for the elderly's welfare. Its important for workers to keep communication open with the children to foster understanding and closeness with their parents.

“For seniors living alone, neighbors and friends are vital contacts.”<sup>[4]</sup>Social workers can enhance

this through group activities, engaging community groups, and organizing events like reading sessions, movies, health seminars, safety talks, and tech training tailored to the elderly. "Counseling groups and social media platforms like WeChat and QQ help seniors stay connected, learn new skills, and access social info." [5] Such groups create a supportive community atmosphere, allowing isolated seniors to interact more, boost confidence, and overcome social barriers.

Furthermore, community workers should cater to the emotional needs of seniors by fostering an open and respectful environment. They can arrange outings to parks, movies, tea parties, and use media to promote respect and affection for the elderly, addressing their desire for companionship and understanding.

### **3.3. Intervention of older people's own support systems**

For individual elderly people who have certain problems that affect their normal life, community workers can carry out casework with them.

**Reminiscence therapy.** Older workers who have had a long career, especially those who have struggled all their lives in their jobs, are generally more proud of their experiences, and community workers can encourage older people to speak out about their experiences, enhance their sense of self-efficacy, and promote the development of a correct perception of themselves.

**ABC Rational Emotive Therapy.** Community workers can deconstruct older people's problems such as "old age" through a model of listening and re-intervention.

The Government should correct the irrational thinking of the elderly such as "the theory of the uselessness of ageing" and help them to establish rational cognition.

**Narrative therapy.** By listening to and analysing older people's experiences, community workers find breakthroughs in deconstructing old narratives and help older people regain confidence and reconstruct healthy new narratives.

## **4. Conclusion**

Inadequate social support for older persons living alone reflects a mismatch between supply and demand and low utilisation of existing support. Older persons living alone have more significant needs at the spiritual level, yet the social support currently available to address this issue is inadequate due to insufficient social security, internal and external discrepancies in the policy system, a lack of community support for older persons and an insufficient labour force to provide professional services, as well as the low sustainability of community services.

Unreliable family support, sporadic market provision, and seniors' personal circumstances, traditional attitudes, and help-seeking mindsets lead to inadequate mental health support for solo elders. Communities often have enough manpower to aid these seniors but lack coordination. Many areas have poor services, few senior-specific programs, and low resource integration, leading to underuse of available support.

Community work interventions aim to create a social support network for solo seniors, set up lasting services, and integrate them into the community. The author suggests policies based on social support theory and various support systems. They advocate for government welfare policies for solo seniors and priority services. There's a push for a community-based aging model and enhanced support in comfort, values, leisure, etc. Integration of community resources and social workers with volunteers is advised. The focus should be on family support, neighborly aid, and tailored services to enhance solo seniors' capabilities.

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