Social Work Service Models and Innovative Approaches for the Urban Integration of Migrant Children

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Abstract: This paper, from the perspective of social work, focuses on the educational, cultural, and social integration challenges faced by migrant children and their core needs. It also addresses the limitations of the existing service models, such as the mismatch between supply and demand, insufficient collaboration among multiple stakeholders, and lagging digital technology empowerment. The paper explores innovative service paths for migrant children. Through strategies such as building a long-term development service system, improving the collaborative mechanism among multiple stakeholders, and strengthening the application of digital technology, it aims to enhance the precision and effectiveness of services, assist migrant children in better integrating into urban life, and promote social equity and integrated development.

Keywords: Migrant Children; Service Innovation; Social Work; Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration; Digital Application

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Issues

According to the "China's Migrant Children Education Development Report (2023)", the number of migrant children in China has reached 35.81 million, accounting for 12.7% of the total number of children in the country. After relocating to cities with their parents, migrant children encounter multiple challenges such as uneven educational resources, cultural identity conflicts, and restricted social interactions. Their degree of urban integration directly affects individual development and social stability. Social work, as a professional social service force, plays a crucial role in facilitating the psychological adjustment, social adaptation, and rights protection of migrant children. However, current services still suffer from issues such as fragmentation, homogeneity, and insufficient resource integration, urgently demanding the exploration of more targeted and effective service models.

1.2 Research Significance

From a practical aspect, the urban integration of migrant children constitutes a key link in the construction of new urbanization. It directly relates to the personal development of migrant children, influencing their personality formation and future adaptability. Simultaneously, it holds profound significance for the stability and prosperity of cities and social equity, contributing to the breaking of the urban-rural dual structure, promoting the balanced distribution of educational resources, and driving the construction of new urbanization towards a higher quality and more inclusive direction.

From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches and refines the local social work theoretical system by collating the practical experience of social work intervention in migrant children. This not only provides replicable model references for serving similar groups but also propels the overall development of the social work profession, enabling it to better serve special groups during the social transformation period.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Research Status at Home and Abroad

In China, research on the social integration of migrant children is primarily based on theories such as the social identity theory and the cultural adaptation theory, exploring the current situation, influencing factors, mechanisms, and strategy choices from the perspective of positive development. In foreign research on social integration, theories such as

the ecological system theory and the empowerment theory are often adopted to analyze the social integration of migrant children from both macro and micro levels, employing diverse research methods including questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews, and case analyses. In domestic practice, a "school-community-family" trinity service model **[1]**, as well as distinctive projects like "cultural adaptation groups" and "urban experience camps" have emerged. Foreign research emphasizes promoting the integration of ethnic minority children through "cross-cultural mentorship programs" and "community resource linkage"**[2]**. Nevertheless, existing research remains insufficient in exploring the "government-society-enterprise" multi-stakeholder collaboration mechanism and the empowerment of service innovation through digital technology.

2.2 Theoretical Basis
2.2.1 Social Support Theory
Social support theory focuses on the impact of interpersonal networks on an individual's mental health and stress relief, arguing that individuals rely on social relationships and need both internal and external resource support. Social support is divided into instrumental support and expressive support. The former includes guidance, assistance, tangible support, and problem-solving actions; the latter encompasses psychological, emotional, self-esteem support, and emotional recognition, etc. Its sources include formal social support systems such as governments and charitable organizations, as well as informal social support systems such as mutual aid networks among relatives, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. This theory emphasizes the construction of formal and informal support networks to provide multi-faceted assistance to individuals, thereby enhancing their social adaptability.

2.2.2 Social Ecological System Theory
The social ecological system theory, proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, emphasizes the interaction between an individual's development and their surrounding environment. It divides the levels at which an individual is influenced by the environment into micro, meso, macro, and exosystems. The microsystem, such as family and school, has direct and frequent influence on the individual; the mesosystem is the interaction between microsystems; the macrosystem includes organizations, institutions, communities, and social culture; and the exosystem refers to systems that have an impact on the individual but do not directly participate. This theory advocates for a systematic analysis of the environment's influence on the individual from micro, meso, and macro levels, and then taking targeted intervention measures to promote the individual's good adaptation to the environment.

2.2.3 Empowerment Theory
Empowerment theory aims to assist individuals, families, groups, and communities in obtaining development capabilities. This theory holds that the powerlessness of disadvantaged groups stems from social environmental oppression, and social workers should help clients recognize that their problems are not caused by themselves and assist them in becoming the main actors in solving their own problems. Empowerment theory emphasizes enhancing self-image and the belief in controlling one's life at the individual level; promoting equality and improving the ability to get along with others at the interpersonal level; and through learning to strive for the fair distribution of social resources and granting organizations and citizens the opportunity to participate in community decision-making at the social environment level. This theory is dedicated to uncovering the inherent strengths of individuals or groups, cultivating their ability and confidence to integrate into society independently, reducing the negative impact of social labeling, and achieving self-empowerment and social integration.

3. Core Dilemmas and Demand Analysis of Urban Integration for Migrant Children

3.1 Core Dilemma
3.1.1The gap between "having access to education" and "receiving quality education" in educational integration
Most of the educational conditions that "migrant children" receive are in schools designated by the government for children of migrant workers or "migrant worker classes" in public schools. Such schools or classes often have low-quality teaching staff, especially in terms of resource allocation, which is far behind that provided to normal urban

children's classes.**[3]** This makes migrant children face problems such as weak teaching strength and difficulty in course connection, thus leading to their lagging academic performance.

For instance, students from a certain private school for children of migrant workers in Beijing reported that the teaching progress of major subjects like mathematics and English was 1-2 units behind that of public schools. After transferring to public schools, their grades dropped significantly and they struggled to keep up with the teaching pace, which seriously affected their academic competitiveness and opportunities for further education. Moreover, due to frequent transfers, there are differences in textbook versions and teaching progress among different regions, causing them to encounter difficulties in curriculum alignment when transferring schools. For example, migrant children who transfer from rural areas to urban schools may feel at a loss when facing experimental courses in subjects like physics and chemistry because rural schools have simple experimental equipment and rarely conduct experimental operations. This increases the difficulty of their learning.

3.1.2 Cultural Integration: The "Double Marginalization" of Identity Recognition

This is specifically manifested as an identity crisis triggered by cultural conflicts between urban and rural areas.**[4]** The "rural label" prejudice of urban children towards migrant children (such as "country bumpkin") traps the latter in a dilemma of "neither being able to identify with urban culture nor gradually distancing from rural culture"**.** This prejudice makes migrant children feel inferior and embarrassed, and they develop psychological barriers when interacting with urban children, being reluctant to communicate proactively. Research shows that 62.3% of migrant children say they "dare not speak to local classmates first", and 41.7% believe that "urban classmates look down on them", which leads to a narrow social circle and difficulty in integrating into the social circle of urban peers. At the same time, migrant children cannot fully integrate into urban culture and gradually drift away from rural culture, falling into an identity crisis. They live in the city and are influenced by urban culture, but due to factors such as household registration and economy, they cannot truly integrate; meanwhile, their rural cultural memories gradually fade, and they often feel out of place when returning to the countryside. This ambiguity in identity makes migrant children lack a sense of belonging psychologically, feel confused about their future development direction, and even suffer from psychological problems such as anxiety and depression.

3.1.3 Social Integration: The Absence of Resource Acquisition and Community Participation

Public service facilities such as community libraries and children's palaces are not fully accessible to migrant children. This is due to factors such as unreasonable opening hours and inadequate publicity, making it difficult for migrant children to fully utilize these resources. Economic pressure on families also limits the opportunities for migrant children to participate in after-school training and develop their interests. For instance, the participation rate in community parent-child activities and volunteer activities is low. Only 23.5% of migrant children have participated in parent-child activities organized by the community, which is far lower than the 68.2% of local children.**[5]** This not only leads to a monotonous range of after-school activities for migrant children and a lack of opportunities to join interest classes and club activities, but also restricts their social interaction scope, making it hard for them to make friends with similar interests. This further affects the establishment of their social support networks and the improvement of their adaptability. Meanwhile, the communities where migrant children live are mostly areas with a high concentration of migrant populations. Community-organized activities are few and lack specificity, failing to meet the needs of migrant children. As a result, their community participation is low and their accumulation of social capital is limited.

3.2 Core Requirements

3.2.1 Developmental needs

Firstly, they are reflected in the demand for high-quality educational resources. Due to the household registration system restrictions, migrant children in cities have difficulty enjoying the same high-quality educational resources as local children, such as teaching staff and teaching facilities. Social workers can

integrate social resources, for instance, by setting up "4:30 Classrooms" in communities with a high concentration of migrant populations to provide after-school tutoring for migrant children, helping them improve their academic performance and make up for the imbalance in educational resources.

Secondly, it is reflected in the cultivation of interests. The extracurricular activities of migrant children are relatively monotonous, and they lack opportunities to participate in interest classes and club activities. Social workers can explore community resources to provide migrant children with diverse interest cultivation activities, such as painting, music, and dance interest groups, to meet their needs for the development of hobbies and interests, and promote the improvement of their comprehensive qualities.

Finally, there is the need for career planning guidance. As they grow older, migrant children face confusion about career development. Social workers can offer career planning courses to help them understand career information, explore their own interests and abilities, and make reasonable career positioning and career planning, so as to better adapt to future career competition.

3.2.2 Emotional needs

Firstly, there is the need for peer recognition. Due to the prejudice and discrimination from urban children, migrant children often find it difficult to integrate into the social circle of urban peers, resulting in a narrow social circle and a lack of peer recognition. Social workers can organize peer group activities, such as interest groups and team games, to create opportunities for migrant children to interact and communicate with their peers, helping them build good peer relationships, gain peer recognition, and enhance their self-confidence and social skills.

Secondly, family support is crucial. The family environment has a significant impact on the socialization development of migrant children. On one hand, parents should provide emotional care and companionship for their children, creating an inclusive and harmonious family atmosphere. On the other hand, social workers can enhance parent-child relationships and promote family harmony through training in parent-child communication skills and parent-child interaction activities, thereby offering emotional support and a sense of security to

migrant children.

Finally, psychological counseling is essential. Due to frequent relocation and environmental changes, migrant children are prone to experiencing anxiety, loneliness, and low self-esteem. Social workers can offer professional psychological counseling services, such as individual case work and group activities, to help them identify and handle emotional issues, learn to control and manage their emotions, and promote their mental health.

3.2.3 Rights-based needs

First, there is the interpretation of household registration policies. When migrant children enter school, there are often high thresholds and complex procedures. Some parents are unable to handle the enrollment procedures for their children due to a lack of understanding of the household registration policies. Social workers can provide interpretations and consultations on household registration policies for migrant families, helping them familiarize themselves with the enrollment process and necessary conditions, and ensuring the right to education for migrant children.

Second, there is legal aid. The legitimate rights and interests of some migrant children may not be fully protected, such as the right to education and medical security, and they may even face risks such as domestic violence. Social workers can collaborate with legal institutions to provide legal aid services for migrant children and their families, safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests.

Third, there is the connection to social security. Migrant children face many difficulties in social security, such as difficulties in medical insurance reimbursement. Social workers can assist migrant families in understanding and connecting with social security policies, helping them apply for relevant welfare benefits, and ensuring the basic living needs of migrant children.

4. Limitations of the Existing Mode

4.1 Mismatch between Supply and Demand of Services

Currently, services for migrant children mainly focus on short-term material assistance, such as seasonal clothing donations and holiday food distributions. Although these emergency services can temporarily alleviate their living

pressure, they fail to meet their long-term development needs in areas such as educational improvement, psychological development, and career planning. For instance, in terms of academic support, there is a lack of systematic course tutoring and college guidance. Psychological services are often limited to one-off lectures or temporary consultations, without establishing a continuous psychological intervention mechanism. This short-sightedness in service provision makes it difficult for migrant children to receive the capacity-building support that truly promotes personal growth and integration into the city.

4.2 Insufficient Collaboration among Multiple Stakeholders

Although there have been attempts at collaboration among social organizations, schools, and enterprises in the field of services for migrant children, such cooperation is mostly limited to short-term collaboration on specific projects. For example, enterprises may only provide financial support during public welfare activities, and the cooperation between social organizations and schools often ends with the conclusion of the project, lacking institutionalized communication channels and coordinated planning. Resources are scattered among various parties, and a long-term linkage mechanism that leverages complementary advantages has not been formed, making it difficult to generate a combined force of services and fully utilize the synergy of multiple stakeholders.

4.3 Lagging Technological Empowerment

The application of digital tools in services for migrant children is still in its infancy. In the demand assessment stage, traditional questionnaires and interviews are still relied upon, resulting in low data collection efficiency and a single dimension of analysis, making it difficult to accurately capture individual differences in needs. During the service tracking process, there is a lack of effective information management tools, making it impossible to timely grasp the progress and feedback of services. In addition, advanced technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence are rarely applied in areas such as service resource matching and personalized service plan formulation, which

hinders the precise and dynamic adjustment of service supply and restricts the improvement of service quality.

5. Innovative Approaches to Services for Migrant Children

5.1 Building a Long-Term Development-Oriented Service System

5.1.1 Innovation in Education Services
Establish a tiered and progressive academic support mechanism: In response to the varying academic foundations of migrant children, design tiered tutoring courses. On the basis of the "4:30 Classroom", introduce resources from professional educational institutions to provide basic knowledge consolidation courses for children with weak foundations; offer extension learning content for those at an intermediate level; and build a competition coaching platform for high-achieving children. At the same time, develop standardized course transition guidelines covering comparisons of textbook differences across regions and suggestions for adjusting teaching progress, to help migrant children quickly adapt to new learning environments.

Advance vocational enlightenment education: Collaborate with enterprises and vocational colleges to start vocational enlightenment activities from the upper grades of primary school. Organize visits to enterprise production lines and vocational college training bases for migrant children, invite industry practitioners to share their career stories, and conduct role-playing experiences in different occupations to allow migrant children to early encounter various career fields, stimulate their interest in careers, and lay the foundation for future career planning.

5.1.2 Integration of Cultural and Psychological Services
Create a dual-track service of cultural identity and psychological adjustment: Combine cultural exchange activities with psychological counseling. When conducting activities such as "Urban and Rural Cultural Experience Day" and "Cultural Integration Art Exhibition", have counselors participate to observe and guide, promptly identify psychological issues arising from cultural interaction among migrant children, and provide targeted counseling. At the same time, offer group counseling courses on cultural identity and mental health to help

migrant children handle identity confusion and enhance their psychological adjustment abilities.

Establish a peer support and role model guidance mechanism: Form peer mutual assistance groups for migrant children, encouraging members to share learning and life experiences and support each other. Invite outstanding migrant children who have successfully integrated into the city to serve as role models and hold experience-sharing sessions to convey positive integration concepts and methods, boosting the confidence and integration motivation of other migrant children.

5.2 Improving the Multi-Subject Synergy Mechanism

5.2.1 Establishing a Regular Synergy Platform

- Form a regional migrant children service alliance: Led by the government, unite social organizations, schools, enterprises, and communities to establish a regional migrant children service alliance. Develop alliance charters and operational rules, clearly defining the responsibilities and cooperation methods of each subject. Regularly hold joint meetings to jointly discuss service plans, resource integration, project advancement, etc., achieving information sharing and resource complementarity.

- Promote institutionalized school, community, and enterprise cooperation: Encourage schools to sign long-term cooperation agreements with social organizations and enterprises, incorporating migrant children services into the school social work service system and corporate social responsibility. For instance, enterprises provide internship bases and vocational training resources for schools, while social organizations assist schools in organizing extracurricular activities and psychological counseling, forming a stable school-community-enterprise cooperation model.

5.2.2 Innovating Synergy Service Models

- Implement "Project - Platform - Network" linked services: Use specific service projects as the starting point, rely on the synergy platform to integrate resources, and build a service network. For example, in response to the interest cultivation needs of migrant children, design the "Art Growth Plan" project, recruit art training institutions, volunteers, and other resources through the synergy platform, and set up service points in multiple communities to form a widely covered interest cultivation service network.

- Develop a model of public welfare venture capital and cooperative operation: The government sets up a public welfare venture capital fund for migrant children services, encouraging social organizations and enterprises to apply for innovative service projects. For high-quality projects, adopt a cooperative operation mode, with the government providing policy support and partial funds, social organizations responsible for project execution, and enterprises offering funds, venues, or technical support, achieving a win-win situation for all parties.

5.3 Strengthening Digital Technology Empowerment

5.3.1 Developing an Intelligent Service Platform - Build a comprehensive information management system for migrant children: Utilize big data technology to integrate multi-dimensional information such as education, family, and psychological aspects of migrant children, and establish a dynamic database. Through the information system, accurately identify and analyze the needs of migrant children, providing data support for personalized services. At the same time, the system can track the service process and effect, and adjust service strategies in a timely manner.

- Create an integrated online and offline service platform: Develop mobile applications or mini-programs to provide online services such as course learning, psychological counseling appointments, policy consultation, and activity registration. Combine with offline community service stations to achieve seamless integration of online and offline services. For example, migrant children can register for community activities through the online platform and directly participate offline, enhancing service convenience.

5.3.2 Apply digital service tools

Use artificial intelligence to assist in needs assessment: Utilize artificial intelligence technologies such as natural language processing and image recognition to develop needs assessment tools. By analyzing data such as language expression and behavioral performance of migrant children, their needs can be quickly and accurately assessed,

improving assessment efficiency and accuracy.
- Employ blockchain technology to ensure transparency of service resources: Introduce blockchain technology in the management and allocation of service resources, recording information such as resource sources and usage, ensuring traceability of resource flow and immutability of information, enhancing the transparency and credibility of resource utilization, and promoting rational resource allocation.

6. Conclusion

Innovative services for migrant children are key to addressing their integration into urban life. By establishing a long-term development-oriented service system, improving the collaborative mechanism of multiple stakeholders, and strengthening the empowerment of digital technologies, the shortcomings of the existing service model can be effectively addressed, and the diverse needs of migrant children can be met. In the future, it is necessary to continuously monitor the dynamic changes of the migrant children group, constantly optimize and innovate service paths, and at the same time, strengthen policy advocacy and social publicity to create a social environment conducive to the integration and development of migrant children, promoting social equity and harmony.

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