Revisiting Social Work with Older People in Chinese Contexts from a Community Development Lens

When East Meets West

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Contents

Abstract

Community development is an empowering and comprehensive method for social workers to address individual and societal challenges facing Chinese older people. This chapter explores the different meanings of community development in Chinese contexts, including communities in Mainland China and Chinese immigrant communities. When actualizing community development,

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social workers require theories to guide their actions, and this chapter proposes three interrelated theoretical bases: ecological system theory, empowerment theory, and anti-oppressive theory. Based on these theoretical bases, three practice directions are suggested to guide community development at different levels: "aging in place," "age-friendly community," and "gray power." In particular, social workers need to adapt community development approaches to Chinese cultural contexts. Case examples are discussed to illustrate how to implement community development projects with older people in Chinese contexts and the roles of social workers in such projects.

Introduction

Improvements in healthcare and standards of living have resulted in an increase in longevity and in the size of the aging population. With at least one or two decades of life span after official retirement age, many older people are faced with more choices and opportunities to further enhance their own aspirations and enrich their purpose in life. Thus, working with older people should not only focus on remedial interventions that deal with problems and challenges but also on supporting these new aspirations and opportunities.

Social work with older people involves different approaches within different sociocultural contexts. From a community development perspective, social work with older adults can take many forms. While some may address problems such as health concerns or social inequity issues, others have focused on empowerment and addressing personal development among aging populations. This chapter will discuss the conceptual bases of community development approaches that are used for working with older people in the community. Focusing on the experience of older people in different Chinese contexts, including Chinese older adults in Chinese societies and older Chinese migrants residing in non-Chinese societies, this chapter will discuss the alignment of community development and its application in social work practice with older people, with attention to the influence of sociocultural context.

Challenges Facing Chinese Older People in Different Contexts

As they age, people experience various challenges, on both individual and societal levels. While Chinese older adults in Chinese societies and older Chinese migrants residing in non-Chinese societies face particular challenges associated with their different contexts, they also face some similar challenges. At the individual level, older people, including Chinese older people, face physical, social, and

psychological challenges associated with increased age. They may experience declining cognition and mobility along with increased likelihood of illness and disabilities (Coyle and Dugan 2012; Lai et al. 2016). Their social network may decrease due to the loss of spouses and friends (Coyle and Dugan 2012), and they may be more likely to experience negative emotions, anxiety, and depression due to physical decline, life transitions, and a decrease in social networks (Parker 2013). Additionally, when older people reflect on their life, they may experience a sense of despair associated with perceived failures and regrets (Parker 2013).

At the societal level, challenges facing older people, including Chinese older people, may be associated with environment, infrastructure, and wider social network dynamics. Community-dwelling older people may rely heavily on facilities provided by housing estates (Chan et al. 2016), and social environments that are not sufficiently age-friendly can hinder social interaction (Lai et al. 2016). For example, limited access to transportation can decrease participation in social activities among older people (Lai et al. 2016).

Additionally, older people may experience ageism, which refers to stereotypes and discriminations against older people (Harris et al. 2018). Societies convey ageism in various ways, such as media representations of older people as expensive burdens or as vulnerable (Hastings and Rogowski 2014). For example, in Mainland China, though the Chinese tradition emphasizes respect for older people and attaches importance to their contributions, this value is changing (Bai et al. 2016). There is an increasing emphasis on productivity (Bai et al. 2016), which means that the social status of older people is decreasing as they are no longer "productive" after retirement. Additionally, in the context of Mainland China, as a result of the "one-child" policy, the younger generation faces difficulty in providing sufficient filial support for older people, as expected in Chinese tradition. Hence, older people may be viewed as a burden for the family, and when older people internalize this view of being a burden to society and family, they experience a greater risk of depression (Bai et al. 2016).

Some older people experience greater challenges and vulnerability associated with aspects of status, such as being an ethnic minority. This experience, known as "multiple jeopardy," also affects groups of older Chinese adults who are immigrants in societies where Chinese are the ethno-cultural minority population (Chow 2010). Older Chinese immigrants not only face challenges common to older people in general but also experience particular physical, psychological, and social challenges associated with their status as ethnic minorities and immigrants in their new communities. Owing to language differences, cultural conflicts, and racial or ethnic discrimination, older Chinese immigrants may be at greater risk of physical illness (Chow 2010) and feelings of marginalization and other psychological distress, such as depression (Chow 2010; Park 2016). Moreover, worries about being accepted by the majority society can reduce involvement in social life (Park 2016). Healthcare and social services may not be user-friendly, due to a lack of culturally sensitive providers as well as language barriers in organizations (Chow 2010), meaning that older Chinese immigrants may be prevented from using needed services.

The challenges facing older Chinese adults, both for those in China and for immigrants, at both individual and societal levels illustrate the need for interventions and supports that address the broader systems and structures that cause these issues. Community development, focusing on empowerment and addressing personal development among aging populations, can be effective in addressing physical, psychological, and social challenges.

Definition of Community Development

To understand the meaning of community development, it is first important to examine the meaning of "community," given that different definitions of "community" lead to different interpretations of community development. Two main definitions can be identified. The first is a "place-based" perspective, which views "community" as a geographic place with physical boundaries, comprised of residents, resources on which residents subsist, and processes through which residents distribute and exchange those resources to address their needs (Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan 2012). The second is a "non-place-based" perspective, which focuses on the connections that people share, such as using the same language or having other shared interests (Human Resource Development Canada [HRDC] 1999; Twelvetrees 2017), shaped by boundaries of moral proximity (Green 2016). People may experience both place-based and non-place-based forms of community. For example, older people may be connected with both peers and other age groups within the same neighborhood, as a result of sharing a particular place, while also being connected to other older people in other geographical locations due to commonalities such as challenges, characteristics (including cultural background or migration status), or interests.

These two perspectives inform different conceptualizations of community development. Scholars adopting a place-based perspective focus on the management of resources in that geographic community (Green 2016), as communities need to rely on resources to subsist and progress (Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan 2012). For example, Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan (2012, p. 297) define community development as a process that "provides vision, planning, direction, and coordinated action towards desired goals associated with the promotion of efforts aimed at improving the conditions in which local resources operate," involving efforts to "harness local economic, human and physical resources to secure daily requirement and respond to changing needs and conditions." Scholars following a non-place-based perspective focus on joint efforts by community members to improve their life circumstance. For example, Meade et al. (2016) define community development as a process through which "ordinary people" make an impact on their living conditions through collective action, while Human Resource Development Canada (1999) interprets community development as a process through which community members take action and propose solutions together to address common challenges.

Regardless of the perspective adopted, different community development actors will use different approaches, which can be broadly synthesized into three forms of

community development (Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan 2012). The first is an "imposed" form of community development, which involves the improvement of community through physical and economic development and is usually promoted by private industry and government actors. The second is a "directed" form of community development, which refers to structural improvement to a community promoted by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) or government, in which community members are invited to participate. The third is a "self-help" form of community development, which implies community members' own efforts to carry out programs or activities (Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan 2012).

Community Development and Social Work Practice

Community development is an important component of social work practice. Community development in social work concentrates on empowering various sections of society, such as creating employment opportunity and promoting gender equality (Dhavaleshwar 2016). Scholars have discussed different roles for social workers in community development, focusing on advocacy and empowerment. For example, Das et al. (2018, p. 389) suggest that social work "has the potential to be mutually supportive to address gaps, design interventions and lobby more influentially for the use of empowering community-based approaches." Similarly, Gilbert (2014) suggests that through community development, social workers can promote problem-solving in human relationships as well as social change, empowerment, and liberation in order to enhance well-being.

Effective community development has been described as having the following characteristics: (1) it is long-term, (2) it is well-planned, (3) it is inclusive and equitable, (4) it is holistic and integrated into the bigger picture, and (5) it is initiated and supported by community members (HRDC 1999). Therefore, social workers should pay attention to these characteristics when planning and promoting community development. Yet, while the conceptualization of community development is mostly situated in "western" cultural contexts, it is also important to address how community development could be realized as part of social work practice in Chinese contexts, which represent the range of different sociocultural and political values emerging among Chinese people residing in different juridical contexts. In the context of this chapter, this includes both Chinese older adults in Chinese societies and older Chinese migrants residing in non-Chinese societies.

Meanings of Community Development in Chinese Contexts

Given that social, cultural, and other dynamics in Chinese community contexts are different from those in "western" countries, community development will involve different approaches and focuses in Chinese contexts. Even within Chinese contexts, community development may be understood differently when working with Chinese older adults residing in a Chinese jurisdiction such as Mainland China as compared

to Chinese immigrants in other countries such as Canada. Even within these groups, identities, challenges, and experiences may differ widely. For example, social, political, and economic contexts affecting aging differ across Chinese jurisdictions, such as in the cases Hong Kong and Mainland China. Similarly, the experiences of older adults in Chinese immigrant communities are shaped by factors such as region, community, and language of origin; social, political, and economic contexts in countries and communities of residence; immigration and settlement policies; ethno-cultural community presence; and so on. The following paragraphs further explore meanings of community development among these diverse groups.

Community Development with Chinese Immigrant Communities

When working with Chinese immigrants, practitioners may adopt a non-place-based perspective on community, focusing on immigrants with Chinese nationalities (Yeung and Ng 2011; Yuen 2013), who may live in different geographic locations. Practitioners may have to adapt community development strategies to Chinese cultures, which value social harmony, social relationship, and collective good (Yeung and Ng 2011; Yuen 2013). Yeung and Ng (2011) suggest that concepts such as empowerment, social change, and equality, which are often identified as elements of community development, may not be easily be adopted by Chinese immigrant communities, who may not have been frequently exposed to these western values. Although it has been argued that actions focusing on collective good and collective responsibility may be more acceptable (Yeung and Ng 2011), social workers can play important roles in facilitating mobilization and socialization with immigrants from Chinese cultural contexts, in order to achieve the desire for change as well as processes of individual as well as collective empowerment. For example, Yuen (2013) describes a community development project in Canada in which Chinese immigrants volunteer in building a low-income senior and new immigrant residence and community center. Participants enjoyed the socialization aspects of this project, which strengthened their social relationships and contributed to solidarity within the community. Family-like connections among Chinese immigrations in turn provided sources of support that serve to strengthen social relationships (Yuen 2013). Therefore, it is believed that empowerment and equity could also be achieved via focusing on collective efforts and collective goods, reflecting a broader conception of "empowerment" (beyond only individual dimensions).

Community Development with Communities in China

When working with Chinese residents in China, the contemporary political situation and structures means that "community" is generally interpreted as a geographic place administered by a Residents' Committee and Street Office (Bray 2006). There are three characteristics of this understanding of community: (1) each community has a territorial space, (2) the nature and functions of the community are determined

by the government, and (3) the community performs administrative roles (Bray 2006). This specific definition of "community" means that community development has its own meanings in China, shaped by political, economic, and historical dynamics.

Since the breakdown of the work unit system (a system intended to facilitate social regulation and provide social welfare in the early developmental stage of Modern China (He and Lv 2007)), the community has had to take on functions that were originally performed by the work unit system (Li 2013). Additionally, with the increasing number of rural migrant workers in urban centers (Bray 2006), a process of "community building" has been proposed, adapted from the concept of community development (Li 2013). Therefore, community development in China often refers to community building, in which the community takes care of various issues (e.g., welfare services, environment, education, grassroots democracy) in order to "promote social development, raise living standards, expand grassroots democracy and maintain urban stability" (see Bray 2006, p. 536). In this sense, community building is, in a way, an imposed form of community development because it is the administrative offices that take on responsibilities to improve the environment in communities, focusing not only on the physical and economic environment but also welfare service provision and cultivation of grassroots organizations in community building.

Some grassroots organizations have also been initiated and governed by community members in China. For example, the Owners' Committee was set up by residents, through which they deal mainly with issues in their living areas with their own efforts (Li 2013), reflecting to some extent a "self-help" approach to community development. However, the Owners' Committee is supervised by the Residents' Committee (State Council of the People's Republic of China 2016). Therefore, community development in China is mainly promoted by administrative offices in each community, focusing on physical and social environment improvement.

Theoretical Bases for Community Development with Older People

When approaching community development work with older people, theories provide the frameworks to enable practitioners to understand events and generate strategies for practice (Phillips and Pittman 2014). The following sections examine three main frameworks that inform understandings of and approaches to community development with older people as part of social work practice: ecological system theory, empowerment theory, and anti-oppressive practice.

Ecological System Theory

Ecological system theory provides a framework for understanding the interaction between different levels of systems that comprise both the environment and people

(Menec et al. 2011). The first level is the microsystem, which refers to a person's immediate surroundings, such as family. The next is the mesosystem, which involves the connections between two or more microsystems, such as the interaction between peers and family. This is followed by the exosystem, referring to the social settings that have indirect effects on individuals, such as workplaces, and then by the macrosystem, which consists of larger contexts such as social values and cultural beliefs. The broadest level is the chronosystem, which refers to a person's life transitions or historical events in society. Systems in all levels interact with each other (Paat 2013). As community development deals with aspects of the environment, ecological system theory provides a way to comprehensively examine the influence of environments (at different scales) on older people and serves as a guideline to improve these environments. For example, ecological system theory has been used to understand how environmental factors influence the participation of older people in community activities (Greenfield and Mauldin 2017).

Empowerment Theory

Empowerment refers to a process of "letting client, group or community have as much control as possible over the change processes they are involved in" (see Vongchavalitkul 2015, p. 14). Empowerment theory emphasizes the participation of community members in the change process, to ensure that they have the power to control this process. As a result of structural challenges, older people, especially those experiencing "multiple jeopardy," may be marginalized from gaining resources and opportunities, which can lead to a sense of powerlessness. Therefore, empowerment theory can provide a framework for social workers to facilitate the involvement of older people in community change projects, through which these older people can enhance their resources and address their own needs (Irving 2015).

Anti-oppressive Practice

Anti-oppressive practice is an approach to work with people who are oppressed by structural inequalities such as poverty and racism, and creating changes to correct the oppressive status is important (Dominelli 1998). This is closely related to empowerment theory, as both pay attention to addressing inequalities resulting from power differences in relationships. Therefore, anti-oppressive practice is often used alongside empowerment-focused approaches. Societal stereotypes regarding older people mean that they often face oppression. For example, people with dementia might be deprived the right to make their own decisions by carers because they are viewed as people with poor cognitive functions (Martin and Younger 2000). Therefore, it is important for practitioners to support the establishment of anti-oppressive environments for older people.

These three interrelated theories highlight principles of community development such as empowerment, social justice, participation, and so on. Together, they can serve to guide the design and operation of community development projects for older people. For example, ecological system theory could be used to raise awareness among older people to examine the influences of their environments (e.g., barriers that lead to inequality, comprising a key element of anti-oppressive practice) or used as a guideline to improve aspects of these environments. As part of community development processes, empowerment can serve as a framework to facilitate the participation of older people and enhance their abilities to cope with and address community issues. It should be noted that when applying these three theories, the different meanings of community development in Chinese contexts should be considered, based on the specific experiences and challenges of older adults in Chinese jurisdictions as well as older Chinese immigrants in other places. For example, the concept of empowerment and anti-oppression could be adapted to emphasize the principle of collective good in community development with Chinese older people. In these ways, social workers can "normalize" community issues and raise awareness among older people about how they, as a group, are disadvantaged by the environments in which they live and potential strategies for change.

Practice Directions for Community Development with Older People in Chinese Contexts

The following paragraphs introduce three broad practice directions for operationalizing community development in working with older people – aging in place, age-friendly communities, and "gray power" – with a focus on their implementation within the general Chinese cultural context.

Aging in Place

Aging in place (AIP) refers to "the ability of older adults to live in their homes or communities as long as possible" (see Lehning et al. 2017, p. 235). AIP aims to enable older people to maintain their social relationships and daily lifestyle in an environment with which they are familiar, which also facilitates independence and a sense of control over their lives (Iecovich 2014). Several theories support the concept of AIP and guide its operationalization. The "theory of insideness" focuses on people's attachment to place along three dimensions: physical (sense of environmental control), social (social relationships), and autobiographical (attachment to place, developed from memories that shape self-identity) (Iecovich 2014). Older people develop strong ties to a place along these three dimensions (Iecovich 2014) and have a high willingness to age in their communities. Empowerment theory focuses on helping older people age in place by promoting participation and autonomy (Mcdonough and Davitt 2011). Person-in-environment theory supports

the realization of AIP by focusing on mutual interactions between individual and environment: individuals are influenced by their environment but can influence the environment at the same time (Weiss-Gal 2008). Practitioners can assist older people to adapt to their environment (aging in place) by realizing their potentials and mobilizing the community to support adaptation.

Scholars have described a "village" model to realize the concept of AIP, referring to grassroots organizations that are formed, governed, and served by residents in the community (such as community-dwelling older people) (Mcdonough and Davitt 2011; Scharlach et al. 2012). Those nonprofit organizations provide services for older people in the community through volunteers, generally focused on non-professional services such as housekeeping, transportation, etc. (Mcdonough and Davitt 2011). Social workers can play several roles in promoting AIP (Scharlach et al. 2012). As community organizers, social workers can help to foster a sense of commitment to the community and mobilize and support residents to provide assistance for older people in the community. As assessors, social workers not only help community members to understand their challenges and make plans but also help them to evaluate the strengths and resources they have and to use their abilities to support older people. As brokers, social workers connect community members with resources to assist them (Scharlach et al. 2012).

The village model reveals a key concept of AIP: mobilizing community members to help community-dwelling older people adapting to place. The process of building, mobilizing, and utilizing capacity of community members to assist older people in the community aligns with Chinese cultural and political situations, illustrating its applicability in Chinese contexts. First, it reflects an emphasis on the collective good. Second, as the community shoulders the responsibility for development, this requires joint efforts from residents (Yan 2011). In China, for example, administrative offices encourage self-help from residents to reduce the burden of solving problems in communities, including by cultivating grassroots organizations, which relies on mobilizing, building, and utilizing the capacity of community members.

One way to do this is by promoting volunteering, as volunteers acquire knowledge and skills as well as utilizing their abilities in this process (Akingbola et al. 2013). Social workers can improve the commitment of community members to be volunteers, by mobilizing them, assessing their existing strengths, and enriching their knowledge and skills through training (Guo 2018). Scholars and practitioners in China have emphasized the importance of recruiting volunteers to assist community-dwelling older people, such as a project in which the "young-old" assist the "old-old," which involves cultivating "young-old" volunteer teams who are trained to apply their knowledge and skills to assist "old-old" people with daily living (e.g., meal delivery) and mental health (e.g., reducing loneliness through home visits) (Hong 2012).

Age-Friendly Communities

Age-friendly communities (AFCs) focus more on the influence of the environment, referring to "policies, services, settings and structures support and enable people to age actively" (World Health Organization [WHO] 2007). This involves a focus on both the physical and social environment in the community (including issues such as safety, accessibility, and stereotypes) across eight interacting domains: transportation, housing, outdoor spaces and buildings, social participation and interactions, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, and community support and health services (WHO 2007).

Two theories can be used to interpret and support AFC. First, the person-environment fit perspective assumes that people are likely to be maladapted if there is a low level of fit between their needs and environment (Park et al. 2017), indicating that environment plays a crucial role in individual's adaptation. Therefore, "even those who have limited resources and capability can age optimally if environmental characteristics support them in a way that compensates for their limitations or lack of resources" (see Park et al. 2017, p. 1328). In this sense, an age-friendly environment is helpful for vulnerable older people to age well because, for example, it compensates for personal limitations such as disability by building lifts to increase mobility. Second, ecological system theory reveals interactions between people and various systems in the environment (Menec et al. 2011), which is highlighted in AFC efforts. For example, social participation influences social inclusion, but social participation depends on the accessibility of outdoor spaces (WHO 2007).

The achievement of AFCs relies on addressing issues such as commitment, capacity, collaboration, and consumer involvement (Scharlach and Lehning 2016), in which social workers can play a role. First, it is important to improve commitment of relevant stakeholders to facilitate change in a community, and social workers can help to reduce ageism and enhance awareness of the importance of building AFCs. Second, social workers can serve as educators to enhance community capacity for developing and implementing AFC change processes. Third, since change processes require joint efforts from various stakeholders, social workers can be mediators to facilitate stakeholder collaboration. Creating AFCs relies on interdisciplinary collaboration between various stakeholders. However, this is not easy to create and sustain, and social workers require skills and knowledge (and thus training) to lead collaboration (Garcia et al. 2010). Finally, social workers can facilitate the involvement of older people in developing AFCs, which is important because it can support greater responsiveness to community needs, capacity building, and empowerment, as well as enhanced use of existing and new programs and services (Scharlach and Lehning 2016).

As Rémillard-Boilard et al. (2017) note, the inclusion and participation of older people in developing an age-friendly community is important to achieve age-friendliness. For example, in an age-friendly project in Guangzhou, China (Lai et al. 2017), older people in different communities were invited to take part in sharing views and generating ideas about how to make their community more

age-friendly. However, Chinese older people may have different perspectives on community participation. For example, older people in China do not have strong sense of citizenship and may have limited understanding of the importance of community participation and thus may have low willingness to participate in community initiatives (Zhao and Huo 2018). Older Chinese immigrants, who value social relationships where trust is developed, may not be willing to participate in activities that do not include people they trust (Yeung and Ng 2011). Therefore, social workers should explore and address potential barriers to the participation of Chinese older people as part of AFC initiatives.

"Gray Power"

"Gray power" (GP) is a term mentioned frequently in policy and refers to the political power that older people have (Davidson 2012). As the number of older people is increasing and the new generation of older people has higher awareness of improving public services through political actions, their influence on policy is increasing (Davidson 2012). In response to structural barriers such as ageism, older people can use their "gray power" to improve their community and society. Two theories support the idea of GP and provide insights into its operationalization. Anti-oppressive practice considers how people are deprived of power due to structural inequalities (Dominelli 1998), and this perspective can assist older people to aware of the oppressions they are facing and understand how their powers are restricted. Empowerment theory includes three levels, micro, mezzo, and macro, and macro-level empowerment focuses on influencing resource distribution through collective action (Kruger 2000), revealing a process through which older people can use their power to fight for more resources.

Social workers can play important roles in assisting older people to exert their power. First, social workers can be educators to raise awareness of how structure barriers lead to particular challenges and problems (Mchugh 2012) and can support and strengthen older people's abilities to access information and take action (Inaba 2016). Second, social workers can serve as facilitators to bring older people together and support them to generate solutions and seek policy changes (Inaba 2016).

For some older Chinese adults in Mainland China, some moderate strategies to address community issues may be preferred, due to their sociocultural and political upbringing. For instance, one approach used by community workers and researchers is photovoice and may be considered. This is a qualitative research method that enables people to record (through photographs) and reflect on strengths and concerns in their communities, promotes critical thinking about the influence of environment on individuals through discussion of photographs, and reaches who can make changes such as policy makers through the exhibition of photographs (Sitter 2017). When discussing their photographs, participants reflect on how they relate to their lives; the reasons for which a problem, concern, or strength exists; and what can be done about it (Sitter 2017). Individuals are empowered by voicing their concerns and raising awareness of concerns in the community and among policy

makers (Sitter 2017), which can lead to policy changes. Chui et al. (2019) describe a photovoice project to raise civic awareness among older people in Hong Kong. Older people received training on skills such as theme identification and presentation, and a public photo exhibition was launched to raise public awareness. This enhanced participants' ability and willingness to participate in community and civic affairs. In this way, social workers can support and facilitate the empowerment of older people and maintain an equal position with participants throughout the process (Sitter 2017).

These three practice directions are interrelated and show a progressive relationship. AIP focuses more on individuals' adaptation to the environment, at the micro level, while AFC emphasizes improving physical and social environment in the community for older people, at the mezzo level. Lastly, GP focuses on policy and political changes, at the macro level. Through engagement with these three practice directions, social workers can support community development processes with older people in a comprehensive way.

Conclusion

Chinese older people encounter various challenges, from individual to societal levels, illustrating the need for comprehensive responses beyond the individual level. Social workers can apply the practice of community development in working with Chinese older people, representing an approach to intervention and support that addresses broader systems and structures and focus on empowerment and personal development among aging populations. This chapter has explored definitions of community development and its meanings, with a focus on diverse Chinese contexts, including those of Chinese older adults in Mainland China and Chinese immigrants in non-Chinese societies. Three interrelated practice directions, including aging in place, age-friendly communities, and "gray power," provide insight into how social workers can engage in community development processes with older people, including in Chinese contexts.

Community Development Cases in Chinese Context and Cases Examples

The following describes two cases of community development projects with older Chinese immigrants, which integrate the concepts of empowerment theory and anti-oppressive practice. The two cases reveal how social workers can apply these two concepts in community development with Chinese older people and the roles they can take on in such projects.

One particular challenge that older Chinese immigrants may experience concerns elder abuse when living with adult children and their families. They may tend to hide abuse due to a fear that their children would desert them and the cultural belief of not disclosing family matters to outsiders. As a result, there may be little awareness

of this issue among community members. In a community development project in Canada (Lai and Luk 2012), raising awareness of elder abuse among Chinese older people and their children was the goal. Some Chinese older people were invited to talk about incidences of elder abuse and then were involved in group discussions to generate solutions for educating community members about this issue. They decided to design a comic book to present the problem of elder abuse, as they thought that pictures would be easier to comprehend than words and would be readable for older people with low literacy capacities. Social workers invited some experts to design the comic book with the older participants, and the comic books were distributed to various elderly centers.

This case integrates the concept of empowerment. Social workers empowered Chinese older people by raising their awareness of an important community issue and supporting those older people to take action to tackle this issue. Throughout the project, Chinese older people were responsible for discussing the issue, generating solutions, and implementing those solutions. Social workers acted as facilitators and brokers (linking participants to resources). The most challenging part was raising awareness of elder abuse among older Chinese immigrants – an important step in the empowerment process – because it contrasted with Chinese cultural concerns. Therefore, social workers needed to normalize the issue and ensure that Chinese older people were aware that this issue influenced their well-being.

The second case involves a project to involve Chinese older people in Calgary, Canada, into combatting discrimination. In 2003, there was a SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) outbreak in Calgary, and some members of the public thought that Chinese people had brought the virus to their city. Older Chinese immigrants not only experienced public discrimination, but also worried about their vulnerability to SARS. In this case, workers at a Chinese Senior Center brought the Chinese older people together to discuss the issue and later launched a public meeting with representatives of government health officials and local politicians to discuss how to reduce public stereotypes toward SARS and the Chinese community.

In this case, social workers applied the concept of empowerment and anti-oppressive practice. Chinese older people were supported to take collective action and expressed their perspectives in order to reduce public stereotypes. Through this process, their capacity to express and present opinions and discussion skills were improved, and their social networks were strengthened or extended. Social workers serve as mediators in discussions between Chinese older people, Health Authority officers, and legislative counselors. Social workers also took on roles as facilitators and brokers to support Chinese older people to take collective action and provide necessary resources.

These two cases illustrate that when social workers carry out community development projects with Chinese older people, they can serve as facilitators to raise awareness of community issues and as brokers to link older people with resources such as networks with other professionals, in order to support Chinese older people to deliver collective action. However, given the increasing educational level of Chinese older people, their awareness of their rights and possibilities to mobilize through community development may be stronger, and social workers may work less

in the facilitator role and more as brokers to support those older people to improve their well-being through their own collective action.

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