

## FACTORS AFFECTING SOCIAL WORK SERVICES FOR THE ELDERLY

**PHUNG DINH VINH**

Academy of Policy and Development (APD)

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### ABSTRACT

This article focuses on investigating the factors influencing social work services provided to the elderly in nursing homes. These factors include policy mechanisms regarding social work for the elderly, the financial capacity of social protection centers, the professional qualifications of social workers, the families of the elderly, the management capacity of social protection centers, and the psychological state of the elderly.

**Keywords:** elderly, policy, influencing factors

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Vietnam, along with many countries around the world, is experiencing rapid population aging. According to the report "Unemployment and Employment in 2014" by the Institute of Labor Science and Social Affairs (Ministry of Labor, War Invalids, and Social Affairs), as of July 1, 2014, Vietnam's population reached 90,659,000 people. The proportion of people aged 60 and above increased from 9.4% in 2010 to 10.4% in 2013, and reached 10.46% in the second quarter of 2014. This data confirms that Vietnam has officially entered the period of population aging. Demographic experts predict that the proportion of the elderly will reach 12.4% by 2020, 15.8% by 2030, 20.8% by 2040, and by 2050 the elderly population will have tripled compared to the present.

Population aging brings with it a series of economic, social, and cultural challenges—not only at the individual and family level but also at the community, national, and global levels. In Vietnam, the issue of elderly care carries important economic, political, and social implications, and even deeper humanitarian significance.

The Vietnamese nation has always upheld the tradition of "drinking water, remembering the source," "respecting the elderly and caring for the young." The elderly, having made significant contributions to the nation, deserve to be cared for and supported with appropriate policies. Over the years, the Vietnamese Party and State have paid increasing attention to the elderly by issuing policies and laws and by establishing nursing homes and social protection centers. The system of policies supporting the elderly is continually being supplemented and improved. These efforts from society, the State, and social organizations have helped enhance the quality of life of the elderly, especially those without family support. They also enable the elderly to continue promoting their abilities and experiences to contribute positively to society.

Moreover, ensuring a good quality of life for the elderly is not only a moral and cultural tradition but also a legal obligation recognized in the 2013 Constitution of the Socialist

Republic of Vietnam. The Constitution affirms that taking care of the elderly is both a right and a human right that the State is responsible for guaranteeing.

## **2.0 RESEARCH**

### **2.1 Policy Mechanism Factors Affecting Social Work for the Elderly**

The provision of social work services to the elderly largely depends on the policies and mechanisms issued by the Party and the State concerning support for the elderly. In Vietnam, as the social work profession has developed, the regulations governing social work services for the elderly have become increasingly clear. The rights and benefits of the elderly are specifically stipulated in the Law on the Elderly (2009), the Ordinance on the Elderly issued by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly (2000), and various other legal documents such as the Law on Protection and Care of People's Health (1989) and the Labor Code (2018).

The responsibility for taking care of the elderly is defined as primarily that of their children, grandchildren, or individuals who have a legal caregiving obligation under the Law on Marriage and Family. If the elderly do not have children or grandchildren to provide care, they are entitled to social allowances and can be admitted to social protection institutions or social housing. This provision is stipulated in several legal documents, including the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1992), the Law on the Elderly (2009), the Ordinance on the Elderly (2000), the Law on Protection and Care of People's Health (1989), the Law on Marriage and Family (2014), the Labor Code (2018), Decree 136/2013/NĐ-CP dated October 21, 2013 regulating social assistance policies for social protection beneficiaries, Government Decree No. 67/2007/CP on social assistance for social protection beneficiaries, and Decision No. 47/2006 issued by the Minister of Finance on regulations for managing and using the Elderly Care Fund.

Regarding the social work profession, the roles and responsibilities of providing social work services to the general population and to the elderly in particular were legalized through Decision No. 32/2010/QĐ-TTg dated February 25, 2010, which approved the Project for the Development of the Social Work Profession for the 2010–2020 period.

Thus, the rights and benefits of the elderly, along with the agencies and individuals responsible for safeguarding those rights, are all governed by policies from the Party and the State regarding the elderly. Social work services for the elderly are also subject to the influence of these mechanisms. However, because these documents are macro in nature, the policy mechanisms regarding the elderly in general—and social work services for the elderly in particular—only define general frameworks, such as who can participate in providing social work services or what the minimum benefits for the elderly are. These documents do not specify the quantity or quality of services to be provided.

### **2.2 Financial Factors of Social Protection Centers**

For elderly individuals residing in social protection centers, these institutions are the organizations directly responsible for providing social work services. However, the availability and quality of these services largely depend on the financial capacity of each center. The expenditures required to provide services for the elderly may include: daily meals; costs for

medical treatment, rehabilitation, and psychological care; expenses for cultural, recreational, and spiritual activities; and costs related to sports and physical activities.

Social protection centers that have abundant financial resources can allocate more funds to improve infrastructure, hire well-trained staff, and provide a greater range of quality services for the elderly. In contrast, centers that operate with limited budgets may be unable to ensure even the most basic needs, let alone offer comprehensive or specialized social work services.

### 2.3 Professional Qualification Factors of Social Workers

Social workers are the direct implementers of social work services for the elderly; therefore, their professional competence plays a decisive role in determining service quality. In order to effectively carry out social work, social workers must possess a wide range of knowledge and skills. These include an understanding of human behavior, human development across the life cycle, as well as social, economic, and cultural issues—and the interrelationships between them.

The elderly represent a unique and specific group. Due to age-related health decline and withdrawal from the labor force, they face numerous challenges related to both physical and mental health, as well as disruptions in social relationships. Thus, social work services for the elderly must go beyond assessing needs—they must also focus on evaluating personal capacities, offering encouragement and emotional support, and helping maintain physical well-being, psychological stability, and social connectivity. The ultimate goal is to enhance the overall quality of life for elderly individuals.

To do this effectively, social workers must be equipped with the following:

- Knowledge of elderly care practices
- Understanding of the psychological characteristics of aging
- Attitudes appropriate to elderly care (e.g., patience, empathy, dedication)
- Practical skills in elderly support and intervention

Because of these specialized demands, the professional qualifications of social workers directly affect the efficacy and sustainability of the services they provide.

### 2.4 Family Factors of the Elderly

The family holds a particularly important role in Vietnamese culture. Traditionally, Vietnamese people view caring for aging parents and grandparents as a moral duty of children and grandchildren. This duty is deeply ingrained through proverbs and folk songs, such as:

- “Drinking water, remember the source”
- “Wholeheartedly serve your mother and respect your father / To fulfill filial piety is the true path of a child”
- “Children rely on parents; the elderly rely on children”
- “When hungry, eat wild date shoots / Save the rice for mother, whose teeth are weak with age”

This moral obligation is not only a matter of tradition but has also been codified into law, particularly in legal provisions concerning obligations to support the elderly.

For most elderly people, the family is the main source of both material and emotional support. Since many elderly individuals are no longer part of the labor force, a substantial part of their income comes from their children or grandchildren. Additionally, due to declining health and increasing vulnerability, elderly individuals often depend on their family members for medical care and physical support.

Furthermore, elderly people gradually lose social connections—either objectively (friends aging, passing away, or becoming less socially active) or subjectively (reduced engagement in social or professional life). This makes familial relationships the central focus of their emotional lives. A study by Vu Dung and colleagues on the elderly population in Vietnam showed that nearly all elderly people wish to live with their children and grandchildren; living in a nursing home is often seen only as a last resort.

In the context of providing social work services for the elderly, family members often take on some of the responsibilities that would otherwise be handled by professional social workers. They provide emotional support, help meet basic needs, and act as bridges to connect elderly individuals with community services. Even when professional social workers are involved, the family plays a critical role—either facilitating or hindering access to services. Therefore, the family is an influential factor in the provision and effectiveness of social work services for the elderly.

## **2.5 Management Capacity Factors of Social Protection Centers**

Although social work as a profession has seen notable growth in Vietnam over the past two decades, awareness and understanding of its role and benefits are still limited among the general public—and even within some organizations tasked with delivering care. This includes social protection centers.

The provision of effective social work services to the elderly in such centers depends significantly on the knowledge, attitudes, and leadership abilities of their managers. If the leadership does not fully understand or appreciate the value of social work for the elderly, they may not prioritize or integrate such services into their organizational care plans.

Moreover, the center manager's capacity to mobilize and coordinate resources—both internal and external—also plays a crucial role in determining the scope and quality of services. Competent leadership is essential for organizing activities, ensuring professional standards, recruiting and retaining qualified personnel, and building partnerships with other institutions to supplement care.

Thus, the management capacity of social protection centers directly influences the efficiency, professionalism, and sustainability of social work services for the elderly.

## **2.6 Psychological Factors of the Elderly**

Social work is a client-centered profession—it must be grounded in the specific needs and capacities of its service recipients. Therefore, any effective social work intervention targeting the elderly must take into account their psychological characteristics and mental health conditions.

Elderly individuals have unique psychological features in terms of personality, emotional state, and living habits. Regarding personality, many elderly people exhibit a tendency toward introversion and withdrawal from social interaction. Emotionally, their mental health is significantly influenced by the shrinking of their social networks and often also by physical illnesses and discomfort. As for daily routines, the elderly typically prefer consistency and familiarity. They may resist new experiences or activities, and even when they are open to change, they tend to require more time to adjust.

Given these traits, social workers must design service activities that are in harmony with the emotional and cognitive realities of the elderly. This means selecting familiar, non-threatening approaches that reduce stress, increase comfort, and respect the elderly's preferences. Activities should foster a sense of inclusion, encourage gradual adaptation, and promote both psychological well-being and quality of life.

By taking into account the psychological states and behavioral tendencies of the elderly, social workers can ensure that their interventions are not only more effective but also more compassionate and humane.

### **3.0 CONCLUSION**

This article has comprehensively analyzed the key factors influencing the quality of social work services for the elderly residing in nursing homes. The findings show that the effectiveness of such services does not depend solely on any single factor; instead, it is the result of a complex interplay among multiple interconnected elements.

Specifically, the policy mechanisms need to be developed in a consistent and appropriate manner to establish a robust legal framework that clearly defines the roles, responsibilities, and benefits applicable to elderly care. Stable and sufficient financial resources form the foundation for centers to invest in facilities, equipment, and human resources—all of which are necessary to improve service quality.

The professional qualifications of social workers also play a pivotal role, as they directly determine the effectiveness of counseling, emotional support, and practical assistance provided to the elderly. The presence of skilled and well-trained social workers ensures that the services meet the specific psychological and physical needs of the elderly population.

Furthermore, the family of the elderly is another vital factor. Concern, support, and cooperation from family members can significantly enhance the impact and sustainability of social work interventions. In many cases, family members act as both providers and facilitators of care, playing a dual role alongside professionals.

The management capacity of social protection centers is also essential, as it ensures that activities are carried out in a smooth, efficient, and professional manner. Good leadership

fosters organizational coherence, maximizes resource utilization, and ensures adherence to quality standards.

Lastly, the psychological state of the elderly must always be placed at the center of all service planning and implementation. Understanding and respecting the emotional, mental, and behavioral tendencies of the elderly is crucial for earning their acceptance and cooperation—conditions that are indispensable for achieving the objectives of social work.

It is hoped that the insights presented in this article will provide a comprehensive understanding of the various factors affecting elderly social work services and serve as a practical foundation for improving service quality in the future. In particular, these findings may support the development of evidence-based policies, strategic planning, and capacity building in social protection centers and elderly care systems across Vietnam.

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