

Study on the Current Situation and Challenges of Population Aging in Guangzhou

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Abstract: Population aging exerts a far-reaching influence on urban development. Currently, Guangzhou, seeing a faster pace of population aging, is experiencing this influence. This paper focuses on exploring practical solutions to the challenges posed by population aging by analyzing the current situation of population aging in Guangzhou. On this basis, it identifies several deficiencies in Guangzhou's strategies for addressing population aging and provides recommendations for improvement. The results of this study hold reference value in probing into the issue of urban population aging in China.

1. Introduction

In nations all across the world, greater importance has been attached to the phenomenon of population aging. According to the world standard, a country or region enters an aging society when the proportion of people aged over 60 and 65 accounts for 10% and 7% of its total population, respectively. Data show that China's elderly population, those aged 60 and above, reached 280 million in 2022, accounting for 19.8% of the total population. This indicates that China has advanced to a new stage of an aging society. President Xi Jinping and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) put a high value on the impact of population aging on China's economic and social development, bringing measures for population aging into line with the national strategy. *The Report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC* placed a strong emphasis on pursuing a proactive national strategy in response to population aging, developing elderly care programs and services, and providing better services for elderly people who live alone, thereby ensuring that basic elderly care is accessible to the entire elderly population. To realize national rejuvenation, China must tackle the challenges associated with population aging and explore a path with distinctive Chinese features to address population aging. However, China, the world's most populous country with a total population of 1.4 billion, features local conditions that vary from city to city. Therefore, it is crucial for each city to take such measures as are suitable for local circumstances. Guangzhou, a first-tier metropolis with a population of over 18.67 million, is currently grappling with significant challenges, such as the aging or advanced aging of its population and the phenomenon of the empty nest. The ineffectiveness of traditional family-centered elderly care, coupled with the challenges of elderly care in an aging society, impels the Guangzhou

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government to take action to meet the ever-growing needs of a substantial aging population, thereby ensuring social harmony and stability and promoting urban economic development. As such, Guangzhou should perform pertinent research based on its unique circumstances to develop and improve an elderly care service system tailored to the city's needs.

2. Analysis of the Current Situation of Population Aging in Guangzhou

The aging society has been a problem in Guangzhou for several years. Moreover, the pace of population aging in the city is much faster than in the past. Data from the Seventh National Population Census indicates that Guangzhou is undergoing a rapid process of population aging. Over the past few years, Guangzhou has witnessed a sharp increase in the number of senior citizens, leading to the distinct characteristics of its population aging.

2.1. Large Elderly Population Base with a Significant Number of Empty Nesters and the Aged Living Alone

Guangzhou has 18.67 million permanent residents as of 2021, and 2.13 million of them—or 11.41% of the total population—were 60 years of age or older. Among the elderly population, 1.46 million were aged 65 and above, accounting for 7.82%. While the majority of elderly people resided with their offspring, a considerable proportion also lived alone since they could not be cared for by their children. Specifically, there were 271,600 people aged 60 and above who lived alone and 206,500 elderly couples who lived in empty nests. These figures demonstrate Guangzhou's substantial and increasing aging population, which points to a significant demand for elderly care services.

2.2. Uneven Distribution of the Elderly Population and Significant Differences in the Aging Process across Districts

According to the information provided in Table 1, Guangzhou currently has 11 districts. Each district has a different number of people aged 60 and older. The district with the highest proportion of elderly people is Yuexiu, which has a population of 231,100 people in this age group. This accounts for 22.25% of the total population, making Yuexiu a moderately aging region. Following closely is Liwan District, which has a population of 245,300 people aged 60 and above, representing 19.85% of the total population. Furthermore, the districts of Conghua, Zengcheng, Haizhu, and Nansha have a proportion of elderly people that exceeds 10%. However, in Tianhe, Baiyun, Huangpu, Panyu, and Huadu districts, the proportion of elderly people is lower than 10%. Specifically, Baiyun District has the lowest proportion of 8.35%, with a population aged 60 and above of 312,400. These statistics suggest that the old parts of Guangzhou are experiencing a high level of aging. The new parts of Guangzhou, by contrast, do not enter the aging society due to a larger influx of migrants. The uneven distribution of the elderly population, coupled with significant differences in the aging process across districts, poses challenges to the development of elderly care.

Table 1. Elderly Population Aged 60 and Above in Different Districts of Guangzhou (measured in units of ten thousand people)

District	Number	Proportion	District	Number	Proportion
Liwan	24.53	19.81%	Panyu	22.71	8.54%
Yuexiu	23.11	22.25%	Huadu	15.68	9.55%
Haizhu	31.02	17.06%	Nansha	9.22	10.89%
Tianhe	19.27	8.59%	Conghua	8.98	12.52%
Baiyun	31.24	8.35%	Zengcheng	16.67	11.31%
Huangpu	10.63	8.41%			

2.3. Significant Increase in the Non-native Elderly Residents in Guangzhou

As a first-tier city in China, Guangzhou has become an appealing choice for individuals seeking employment opportunities, leading to a significant rise in its permanent resident population. From 2010 to the end of 2022, the population surged from 12.70 million to 18.73 million, experiencing an average annual growth rate of 3.93%. Notably, a substantial proportion of new residents were non-native elderly people. An overwhelming majority of them relocated to Guangzhou to be closer to their children. This influx of elderly people is expected to place an additional burden on elderly care services in Guangzhou.

2.4. Enter the Primary Stage of Aging Society with the Fast Pace of Population Aging

In the last several years, Guangzhou has seen an even faster pace of population aging. According to data from the Seventh National Population Census, the percentage

of people aged 60 and above has increased by 1.67 points compared to the Sixth in 2010, while the percentage of people aged 65 and above has increased by 1.15 points. In the upcoming years, Guangzhou will experience a further deepening in population aging and face challenges from insufficient public service resources. The rapid pace of population aging in Guangzhou is an inevitable trend resulting from economic development, medical improvement, and rising living standards.

Although Guangzhou has entered an aging society, it is currently in the primary stage of this demographic shift. The percentage of younger elderly, aged 70 or younger, among the elderly population is 56.53%. Generally speaking, Guangzhou is currently benefiting from the demographic dividend as a significant influx of young adults has brought in substantial labor resources, thereby slowing down the aging process in the city. According to the Swedish Life Table of 1957, the elderly population is categorized based on the age of 65 as the threshold. A dependency ratio below 50% indicates a period of demographic dividend [1]. The results of the Seventh National Population Census reveal that the dependency ratio of the permanent resident population in Guangzhou was 27.69%, which measures the proportion of the population under 15 and over 65 years old to the population between 15 and 64 years old. This was significantly lower than the critical value of 50%, the national average of 45.9%, and the provincial average of 37.8%. Compared to other first-tier cities in China, such as Beijing and Shanghai, it was also relatively lower.

3. Strategies and Challenges for Guangzhou in Tackling Population Aging

3.1. Strategies for Guangzhou in Tackling Population Aging

3.1.1 Improve the Top-Level Policy Design of the Elderly Care System

The Guangzhou government considers addressing the issue of population aging a significant project for improving the people's livelihood, bringing it into line with the annual economic and development plans of the city. Strategic planning has been devised to effectively tackle the issue of population aging. Furthermore, the government has placed importance on measures for population aging in its performance assessment and inspection priorities. Additionally, endeavors have also been made to develop municipal rules and regulations concerning elderly care services. For instance, *the Regulations on Elderly Care Services in Guangzhou* and *the Guidelines on Promoting the Development of Basic Elderly Care Service System* have kicked in across the city. These efforts have resulted in the establishment and enhancement of mechanisms for the social elderly care institutions in Guangzhou, thereby bringing the advancement of these institutions into line with the legal

framework. Moreover, emphasis has also been laid on performing research and investigation on elderly care work as well as establishing statistics systems and data analysis platforms for the elderly population. Examples of these include the Guangzhou Home-Based Elderly Care Service Comprehensive Platform and the Guangzhou Elderly Care Service Comprehensive Platform.

3.1.2 Facilitate the Advancement of Elderly Care Services and Develop a City-wide System for Basic Elderly Care Services

The elderly care services in Guangzhou have demonstrated notable advancements across multiple areas. As of the end of 2021, a three-tier system for elderly care services has been established, which includes district comprehensive centers, subdistrict comprehensive centers, and village activity sites. This system ensures that elderly care facilities are available in both urban and rural communities, with a coverage rate of 100%. Additionally, each subdistrict now has at least one comprehensive center for elderly care services, commonly known as the Yikang Center [2]. Currently, there are 178 Yikang Centers in Guangzhou that offer a full range of elderly care services. These centers are dedicated to providing full-time care (including short-term care), day care, and home services to offer comprehensive services for the aged in need, particularly for those who have disabilities or dementia. The services offered include rehabilitation care, living care, medical care, emotional support, palliative care, assistive device rental, cultural entertainment, and emergency assistance.

By March 2023, 1,088 senior canteens have been built, achieving full coverage in the subdistricts of Guangzhou. Additionally, the Guangzhou government has set up 16,000 beds for elderly care, offered financial assistance for home-based elderly care services to 17,000 households, and made age-friendly improvements in 77 residential areas. Basic elderly care services, such as meal preparation, have been provided to 445,000 disabled and elderly people. The availability of beds per thousand seniors has increased from 27 in 2012 to 38 in 2021, representing a growth of 41% [3]. There are 283 elderly care institutions in the city, with over 60,000 beds, the majority of which are privately owned. As per *the Regulations on Subsidies for Private Elderly Care Institutions in Guangzhou* (S.M.G.Z. [2020] No. 11), the government provides subsidies to private elderly care institutions after conducting audits.

Over the past several years, Guangzhou has been grappling with the challenges posed by population aging. The city has exploited its unique superiority to the fullest, striving to assure the elderly of a sense of security and worth by providing medical services, educational activities, recreational activities, and opportunities. One of the key initiatives has been the establishment and enhancement of the elderly care service system, which serves as a catalyst for the development of elderly care services throughout the city. Guangzhou, as a national

pilot city for comprehensive reform of elderly care services, is dedicated to creating a safety net for elderly care, promoting all-inclusive elderly care services, and strengthening the network of community- and home-based elderly care services [4][5].

3.1.3 Actively Develop the Elderly Care Industry to Meet the Varied Requirements of the Elderly Population

Guangzhou has achieved a total output value of nearly RMB 500 billion by actively developing the elderly care sector. The main industries involved include medical services, elderly care services, biomedicine, medical equipment, health management, health tourism, and health culture. Among them, medical services, medical drugs, and medical equipment have prominent comparative advantages with a gradually reasonable industrial distribution. The spatial pattern of the elderly care sector has essentially developed the concept of one core leading, five bases driving, three belts linking, and multiple points supporting. By the end of 2020, several key areas in Guangzhou have undergone construction and upgrades. These areas include the Guangzhou Health and Medical Center, the Guangzhou International Health Industry City, the Nansha Health Tourism Demonstration Base, the Sino-Swiss (Guangzhou) Ecological Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Industrial Park in Conghua District, the Huadu Biomedicine Industrial Park, and municipal-level elderly care industrial parks or zones. Every year, 100 major projects are carried out in the health and elderly care industries, thereby establishing industrial clusters of elderly care services that yield substantial synergistic and agglomeration benefits.

By actively advancing the elderly care industry and developing products that cater to the various needs of the elderly population in areas such as clothing, food, housing, transportation, medical services, and recreational activities, the government can not only fulfill their varying material and spiritual needs, including medical care, cultural and recreational activities, and geriatric food but also stimulate economic growth.

3.2. Existing Problems

3.2.1 Insufficient Supply for Elderly Care Services and Supply-Demand Imbalance

The fast pace of population aging in Guangzhou has resulted in a sharp increase in the total number of elderly people as well as the demand for elderly care services. Although the Guangzhou government and all orders of society have made efforts to increase the supply of elderly care services in recent years, the growth rate of population aging has far exceeded that of available elderly care services. This has resulted in a severe shortage of elderly care services and a significant gap in meeting the needs of the elderly population. Taking elderly care services as an example, the number of beds

for elderly care per thousand elderly people in Guangzhou is insufficient, which makes it challenging for the aged to apply. In addition to the insufficient quantity of elderly care services, there is also a significant imbalance in the structure. Due to the diverse aging population across different districts of Guangzhou, there are variations in the needs for elderly care services as well as the levels of economic growth. This has led to evident disparities in the quantity and quality of services provided for the elderly in each district, further contributing to the imbalance between supply and demand.

3.2.2 Shortage of Elderly Care Professionals and Supply-Demand Imbalance for Employment

In response to population aging, Guangzhou is in need of a large number of competent professionals. Currently, in Guangzhou, there is a severe shortage of professionals for elderly care services, both in terms of quantity and quality. This shortage can be attributed to the neglect of talent cultivation in the early stages, which has resulted in an imbalance between supply and demand for employment. On the one hand, there has been a scarcity of elderly care personnel, primarily migrant workers, along with high rates of turnover. Therefore, challenges have been posed to the majority of elderly care institutions in recruitment. Currently, most elderly care professionals are nursing personnel, predominantly women aged 40 and above, who primarily offer conventional care services such as meal preparation, personal hygiene, and basic nursing care. On the other hand, the competence of personnel in elderly care is subpar, as there is a shortage of professionals such as doctors, nurses, and administrators in medical care, psychological counseling, and spiritual support. The proportion of elderly care personnel with professional titles and certificates is very low, and there are common problems such as inadequate education, poor service skills, and a lack of professional knowledge. The reasons for this are, on the one hand, social bias dissuades many highly skilled individuals from pursuing careers in elderly care. On the other hand, the working conditions for elderly care are unfavorable, characterized by long working hours, low pay, a lack of social security, and a dearth of mechanisms for training such professionals.

3.2.3 Insufficient Government Investment in Elderly Care and Incomplete Elderly Care Policies

As per the current planning of the Guangzhou government, it is necessary to establish a diverse system for elderly care services. In this system, government investment plays a positive guiding role, while nongovernmental capital serves as the primary source of investment. Although the Guangzhou government has been increasing its investment in elderly care services every year, the rapid pace of population aging has made it evident that government investment is still insufficient. The available elderly care services are severely

insufficient, resulting in a significant number of elderly people not receiving essential care services. This is particularly true for those who are non-native residents, making it challenging to provide them with a minimum level of social security. Nongovernmental capital, driven by profit considerations, invests more funds in high-yield and fast-return projects, such as medical drugs and equipment, senior housing, premium medical services and care, and geriatric health food.

In recent years, a series of policies have kicked in across Guangzhou to promote the development of elderly care services. These policies, however, are relatively decentralized, disorganized, and incomplete. Moreover, some of these policies are not comprehensive enough to support the development of the elderly care industry. Consequently, they fail to foster a favorable legal environment for the industry. Furthermore, several incentive measures encounter many obstacles in their specific implementation, hindering their effectiveness. As a result, it becomes challenging to achieve the goal of promoting the development of the elderly care industry.

3.2.4 Shortcomings in the Current Pattern for Elderly Care Services

The current pattern for elderly care services in Guangzhou to address population aging is centered around home-based elderly care, supported by community-based elderly care, and supplemented by institutional elderly care. However, challenges do exist with home-based elderly care, particularly for elderly people who live alone or have disabilities or dementia. These people are unable to independently care for themselves and rely heavily on social and familial support, both in terms of material and financial resources. As such, there need effective measures to support them, such as community-based home medical services, living care, and cultural and recreational activities [6].

Similarly, problems do exist with institutional elderly care in Guangzhou. The elderly care institutions in Guangzhou are predominantly privately owned, comprising approximately 70% of the total. The primary problem lies in the fact that public institutions, being non-profit organizations, charge low fees. However, their operational efficiency is lacking, resulting in an average level of elderly care services. Additionally, the availability of beds for elderly care is limited, making it challenging for eligible elderly people to apply. Private institutions, by contrast, have a greater number of beds available and offer higher levels of elderly care services, catering to diverse needs. Nevertheless, private institutions are currently struggling to survive due to low occupancy rates. The reason behind this is that elderly care institutions, being capital-intensive projects, require a significant amount of investment. Private institutions, functioning with the goal of making a profit, frequently charge higher fees, which can be challenging for retirees with limited income to afford.

4. Recommendations for Improvement

4.1. Enhance Government Financial Investment, Promote the Involvement of Social Institutions, and Achieve a Balance Between the Supply and Demand of Elderly Care Services

The Guangzhou government should improve the supervision and evaluation of elderly care work using platforms like the Guangzhou Home-Based Elderly Care Service Comprehensive Platform and the Guangzhou Elderly Care Service Comprehensive Platform. By utilizing statistics systems and data analysis platforms, the government can promote an understanding of the requirements of the elderly population, thereby increasing financial investment to address the fundamental issues of elderly security. Funds should be incorporated into the government's financial budget with a certain percentage growth each year, thus effectively planning the medium- and long-term funding for elderly care. Furthermore, active involvement should be given to social institutions in the provision of elderly security. Whether they are state-owned enterprises and institutions, private enterprises, social organizations, or medical institutions in Guangzhou, they should actively participate and assume corresponding responsibilities under government guidance. The government should also provide corresponding incentives in various aspects, such as land, finance, taxation, etc., for entities involved in elderly security. Additionally, it is essential to enhance the availability of services for the elderly in areas such as financial services, health care, medical services, cultural and recreational activities, and geriatric food [7].

4.2. Promote Talent Team Construction for Elderly Care Services

Talent cultivation for elderly care services should be considered a priority for Guangzhou to address the challenges of low quality and a shortage of these professionals. Firstly, this can be achieved through collaboration with various educational institutions, including application-oriented undergraduate colleges, higher or secondary vocational schools, and social training agencies in Guangzhou, opening specialized programs that focus on elderly care services, such as geriatric medicine, elderly care, social security, and elderly health [8]. These programs should receive support, including partial tuition waivers for students. Furthermore, it is crucial to establish practice bases for training professionals. This contributes to accelerating the training process and providing opportunities for integration between talent cultivation, the employment of migrant workers, and the reemployment of laid-off workers.

Secondly, it is necessary to provide competitive pay for care personnel, thereby making these jobs more appealing and preventing a high turnover of staff. The government should establish salary standards and provide various subsidies for these personnel. Moreover,

the Guangzhou government should implement supportive measures for these personnel in terms of point-based household registration and public rental housing.

Lastly, it is important to enhance the professional level of care personnel by establishing a qualification certification system for these professionals. Care personnel must obtain certification before being employed. To strengthen the volunteer system already in place, Guangzhou, being a first-tier city, has a multitude of volunteer teams. It is necessary to incorporate successful practices from Hong Kong and other foreign regions, thereby encouraging college students and young seniors to engage in volunteer work [9].

4.3. Revolutionize the Elderly Care Service Pattern and Strengthen Supervision and Administration

Guangzhou needs to develop a comprehensive system for elderly care services catering to the different needs of the aged from various walks of life. There should be innovations in the current elderly care service pattern, including the promotion of new home-based care services, the integration of medical treatment and elderly support, and the implementation of long-term care insurance systems [10]. In terms of home-based care services, it is essential to make age-friendly improvements in residential areas and enhance the availability of elderly care facilities. To ease the financial burden on the aged, it is crucial to establish medical facilities within social institutions for elderly care and incorporate these facilities into the purview of medical insurance, thereby strengthening the connection between medical insurance and elderly support. Additionally, integrated medical and health services should be implemented to provide home-based long-term care services and improve the availability of beds for elderly care in residential areas.

Strengthening supervision and administration is also of great importance for elderly care services. This can be done by establishing comprehensive systems for community-based service centers for elderly home care, with clear standards, content, and methods of services to prevent any potential negative impact caused by inconsistent quality of care. Furthermore, specific admission systems should be developed for social institutions, with standards for funding, sites, personnel, and service content, along with regular evaluations.

5. Conclusion

The impact of population aging on Guangzhou's development will remain significant far into the future. To effectively cope with the challenges caused by this demographic shift, the Guangzhou government, social entities, and families should collaborate and establish a comprehensive urban elderly care system in light of local conditions. Guangzhou should continuously develop innovative approaches for elderly care to address the diverse issues arising from population aging and enhance

the quality of services provided to the aged, thereby making the city more desirable to live in.

Acknowledgment

2022 Guangzhou Regular Program of the 14th Five-Year Plan on Philosophy and Social Sciences (2022GZGJ82)

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