

# Community-Based Social Services for Elderly in Vietnam

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## Abstract

Vietnam has officially entered the aging process since 2011 when Elderly (aged 60 and above) accounted for 10% of the total population. Since then, the population aging rate is increasing rapidly. According to the General Statistics Office, by the end of 2018, the whole country had 11,313,200 older persons, accounting for about 11.95% of the population; of which 5,734,900 older persons (accounting for 50.7%); 7,293,600 older persons living in rural areas (accounting for 65%); the proportion of older persons who are ethnic minorities accounts for nearly 10%; The proportion of Elderly in poor households is about 25.2% (2017). The country has 1,990,000 people aged 80 and over (accounting for 17.6% of the total elderly). It is forecasted that by 2038, the proportion of the elderly in our country will increase to 20%, double that in 2011, making our country a country with an aging population. With an increasing number of Elderly, the demand for care through social services has also become increasingly urgent. This article describes an overall picture of community-based social services for Elderly thus provide solutions to develop that kind of services for Elderly.

**Keywords:** Elderly, Social services, Social Services providing Facilities, Social work

## I. INTRODUCTION

According to the United Nations, since 2011, Vietnam has officially entered the process of population aging. By the end of 2017, the Vietnam had 11 million elderly people, accounting for 11.95% of the population, including nearly 2 million people aged 80 and over. Elderly people are considered as the capital of society because of their contribution to experience, knowledge for development, and a spiritual motivation for future generations and the happiness of every family. So that, elderly people deserves to receive the care and support from family, community, and the State in meeting economic needs, social participation, especially health care to ensure living quality. However, elderly people in Vietnam are currently facing with many different problems. Along with the decline in health, physiology, the elderly also have marked changes in psychology. Elderly people

have impaired ability to think, so they often think slowly, associate slowly and have low self-esteem... Severe psychological changes can lead to anxiety and depression. Elderly people think that they become “a burden” to their family and society. Therefore, they are more likely to feel abandoned and lonely. They are stressed in adjusting to a new situation, when they have to move from active working to retirement, changing their routines as well as narrowing social relationships. Thus, elderly people have many special needs associated with their psychological and physiological characteristics. Today, due to the busy work, many adults now have less time to care for their parents. The sharp increase in the number of elderly people and the fact that the limited amount of time family members take care of elderly parents has led to a rapidly growing demand for social services for the elderly in the community.

A society cannot be assessed as progressive without ensuring the well-being of its people, without social services to assist groups with special needs. In addition to living at home, the current care model for the elderly in our country is mainly implemented in concentration centers, the care model in the community has not really developed. This is a reality that needs to be changed because the resources for maintaining the activities of social protection centers are mainly from the State budget. The number of subjects is increasing and the budget is limited, so the material and spiritual life of the elderly living in the centers of the State is still difficult and in need. Private-aged care centers are limited in size. Therefore, to go along with the process of international integration in terms of social security, Vietnam needs to develop a social service system similar to the region and the world.

Despite the above-mentioned role, the research on development of social services for the elderly in the community has a lot of gaps. There are a number of current studies conducted by foreign and non-governmental organizations mainly focusing on assessing the current situation of the elderly in Vietnam in terms of size, life and health. In-depth research to assess the current situation and development solutions, to improve access to social services in the community for the elderly is still open. Therefore, it has high need

to conduct more studies and researches on social services in the community for Elderly.

## II. SITUATION OF COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL SERVICES FOR ELDERLY

### *Type of community-based social service provider for Elderly*

- *Public/State facilities providing community-based social services for Elderly*

Social protection centers are the first type of Public facilities providing community-based social services for Elderly. In fact, in the past, the social protection centers only took care and nurtured clients which are stipulated in Decree 136 which are children in difficult circumstance, people with disabilities, the mentally ill, wandering, homeless elderly... They are taken care by State without fee but they have to meet the criteria of Decree 136. Thus even if other elderly in the community have a strong need of caring and willing to pay for services, social protection centers still are not able to meet that needs. It is because social protection centers facilities are only allowed to care and provide services for the Elderly in accordance with Decree 136. Actually, in order to provide social services to Elderly in the community, social protection centers must be approved by the provincial People's Council. However, one of the barriers and bottlenecks is that they do not have a legal base to set appropriate service fees. Recently, Circular 02/2018 / TT-BLĐTBXH was issued to regulate Economic-Technical Norms as a basis for setting social service with fees, which is a very useful legal document to remove obstacles above. As a result, recognized the great demand for social services of the Elderly in the community, social protection centers submitted a proposal to the People's Council to be allowed to provide social services with fees for Elderly in community.

Strengths of social protection centers are infrastructure. This type of facilities often have wide space, so they can provide many different service packages such as full-time and short-time services for elderly... These public facilities are also partially supported by the State and receive many policies, so the service fee is, at a certain level, quite competitive compared to private facilities. However, the limitation of public facilities is that the flexibility is not high due to the binding of legal documents. Also like other facilities, specialized services in the field of health, psychotherapy or community connection are not high.

Another type of Public facilities is Social work centers. Since the government's 32/2010 project, most localities have established Social work centers. Social work centers usually have two forms. The first is the establishment of new Social work centers and the

second type is the conversion of functions from Social protection center into Social work centers. With the newly established type of Social work center, facilities and staff are often limited, so the provision of services for the Elderly has not been intensive and there are no full-time service packages for Elderly care in this facility. For the second type of Social work center, due to the change of function and name, these centers still inherit the facilities and human resources of the old Social protection center. Therefore, after being approved by the Province, these centers have established caring services for the elderly with the need to voluntarily take care of these facilities. In other words, the names of the facilities may vary, but the service packages and care types of these centers are quite similar to the social protection centers.

Other type of social service provision facilities is the Elderly Association. Normally, each commune and ward is established the Elderly Association according to Decision No. 972/QĐ-BNV in 2017 on the amended and supplemented charter of the Elderly Association. When joining the Association, Elderly people are guided by the Association, creating favorable conditions to enjoy all benefits according to the provisions of the Elderly Law and other legal documents on regimes and policies for the elderly. Under Association, Elderly is taken care and promoted their abilities; be protected when their legal rights and interests are violated; get help in case of difficulties or troubles; to organize cultural, arts and entertainment activities and visits when sickness; be blessed, happy life expectancy when the prescribed age; be worshiped, see off when passing away. It can be seen that the Elderly Association is a facility and organization closest and closer to the Elderly, the services deployed in the Elderly Association are not really specialized and professional services due to the nature of this type. Most of services are voluntary and do not spend money. Moreover, these are the usual activities of visiting, sharing and entertainment so it is effective only at a certain level. Intensive intervention services as well as long-term support are not available.

Recently, type of Private facility that is caring and providing services for the Elderly is now starting to grow. These facilities provide intensive and specialized services to Elderly who are conditional and need care. With the private facilities being invested, the facilities here are quite good and intensive investment is reserved for Elderly so they, themselves, are benefited greatly from this. In addition, since these are private facilities, the mechanism and structure of operation are quite flexible and can respond quickly to the demands and changes of society. The types of services here are also diverse and specialized in the field of health, nutrition, entertainment ... However, the services are deep in the fields of social work, employment livelihoods or issues

of Limited policy advice service. Psychological counseling services are also not provided, but at these facilities, they only stop at the usual talk and sharing activities.

Para Social worker network was established after the 32/2010 project on the development of Social work profession in the period of 2010 - 2020. Subsequently, the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs issued Circular Circular 07/2013 / TT-BLĐTBXH regulating professional standards of social work collaborators, wards and townships. According to this regulation, each commune and ward needs to form a team of Para Social worker with the tasks of caring for and supporting vulnerable groups including the Elderly. Specifically, commune-level Para Social worker must collect and receive information and support requests of subjects in the locality to promptly report to commune-level People's Committee presidents and socio-cultural officials at the commune has a solution; screen and classify objects and propose to the President of the People's Committee of the commune to refer them to social protection establishments, social work centers, health-rehabilitation facilities, educational and training institutions and other appropriate facilities. Monitoring and evaluating changes in health status, family and social relations and support needs of subjects, competent authorities' proposals the right to provide timely, appropriate and direct support measures. Depending on the specific circumstances, the Para Social worker will be the primary provider of social services directly to the Elderly in the community. In addition, the role of a Para Social worker is also important because they are officials in the community so they are the best one to take care of detection of emergencies or meet the need for immediate assistance. Even if this team is not skilled enough to intervene deeply, they can still play the role of connecting and referring Elderly to the appropriate service providers. Finally, the role of Para Social worker is very important for the services that support Elderly to integrate into the community, follow up to evaluate and ensure the effectiveness of the services for Elderly in community in a sustainable way.

#### **Community-based social service packages for Elderly**

For public service facilities that take care of the Elderly in accordance with Decree 136, there is only one form of long-term concentrated service provision. In contrast, with public service facilities with fees, the form of service delivery is quite diverse, designed according to each service package so seniors and their families can choose. These are full-time (long-term) care packages at the center; full-time care package (short day) at the center; hourly home/family care package; Day care package (day boarding) at the center. The content of the service package is quite diverse

including services from physical health care to mental health. Elderly people will be taken care of from meals, bathing, reflexology massage combined with daily or weekly visits. In addition, many centers also organize many fun and recreational activities to take care of the mental health of the elderly. The activities performed in each service will be agreed by both parties. Specifically, these services are:

- *Full-time care services at the center (long term)*

Care services at the Center are provided in the 24-hour format, a combination of modern and traditional care methods to give the elderly a comfortable and convenient living. Elderly care center with specialized functional rooms, fully equipped with equipment for comprehensive care, spacious campus, airy greenery, professional staff, Enthusiasm, well-trained, dedicated and loving elderly people, is a reliable place for the elderly to enjoy life. At the center, the elderly are entitled to a full range of care services, including personal care, nutrition care, health care, rehab, mental care.

- *Full-time care services at center (short term)*

A form of inpatient care for the elderly in the Center, suitable for families who need a reliable address to send their parents for a short time then return to the family. Short-term care is an inpatient form of care for the elderly who live at the Center. Short-term care is suitable for families who have to move, busy for a short time or families who do not guarantee regular care, no caregivers, need a reliable address to send Elderly with full care for physically and mentally.

- *Home / family care services on demand at home*

Hourly home-based care is a comprehensive care model for the elderly who are ill, have difficulty in moving and living. The service is suitable for the mentality and aspirations of the elderly to want to live in their beloved home for the rest of their lives. Families will be more secure when following the right treatment regimen, controlling unexpected situations and possible risks, saving travel time and hospitalization costs. The caregivers of the Center are well-trained, professional, highly responsible, and knowledgeable about medicine, diet, sleep and activities for each elderly person, chatting, confided in helping the elderly to have a comfortable spirit and belief in recovering from the illness. Every day, the staff will come to the house and perform the care and care for the elderly as required and negotiate with the family. However, because of many different reasons, this package is not delivered.

- *Daily care service (part-time at the center)*

Day care service is suitable for families with relatives, children and grandchildren who are working, during the day do not have time to care, talk to the

elderly. With this service, the elderly are provided with daily basic care services, which ensure the time, nutrition, exercise, socializing environment, meeting, avoiding boredom and fatigue affecting their physical and mental health. In the morning, the elderly come to the Center, then do activities and participate in collective exchange activities (rich content changes every day) with people of the same age, cared for both physically and mentally. In the evening, the elderly are taken home to spend time with their families. Day care service is suitable for the elderly who want their own rich spiritual life while still close to their children and grandchildren.

There are also indirect methods of providing services such as providing services through hotline phone, social networking, internet...

**Tables 1: Social services package for Elderly**

Social services package for Elderly						
	Full time in center	Short time in center	Daily care in center	In family	Phone	Internet
1.	X	X	X		X	X
2.			X		X	X
3.	X	X	X		X	X
4.				X		
5.				X		

Sources: Documentary review, 2019

1. Social protection center
2. Social work center
3. Private facilities
4. Para Social worker network
5. Elderly Association

**Type of community-based social services for the elderly**

Currently, Vietnam with an increasing proportion of the elderly (population aging) is a major challenge for the State and Families. Elderly often have a high incidence of illness and are prone to chronic diseases. In addition, the structure and pattern of diseases of the elderly in our country are now changing according to the trend of non-communicable diseases and rapidly increasing chronic diseases. In addition, because the children and grandchildren are busy working, going to school, they do not have enough time to take care of their grandparents and parents at home. Therefore, the demand for social services taking care of Elderly has increased significantly. In the face of these problems, the elderly need a lot of support services as well as health care for themselves. With the development of Vietnamese economy and society, care

services for the elderly are growing and many different types.

*Medical support services*

According to the World Health Organization (WHO): Medical services include all services of diagnosis, treatment of diseases and activities of care and rehabilitation. These include personal health services and public health services. Elderly people need health care very much because although seniors are experienced, qualified, due to their advanced age, most of them have health problems. Therefore, the care and maintenance of health promotion exercises is essential.

*Entertainment services*

For Elderly, they often face with health difficulties, their mind is often confused, remember before and forget after... So that entertainment to suit with certain Elderly, bring efficiency, improve health care necessary for the elderly in the community. Entertainment activities should be appropriate to the capabilities and needs of Elderly. For those who are in good health and exercise, they can play active games. Conversely, Elderly who are limited in exercise may participate in mental activities such as chess, reading books...

*Nutrition support services*

Physical health also includes nutrition, exercise, for the Elderly, the diet is extremely important. Nutrition is the supply of nutrients to the body through the food we eat. According to nutritionists, in order to have enough nutrients, the body must be provided with all necessary vitamins. Without enough of the necessary vitamins the body will be weakened, called malnutrition. Therefore, providing adequate nutrients will enhance health, heal all diseases. Counseling and health care services can provide safe, scientifically sound and accurate advice on nutrition and interventions, helping to increase understanding of nutrition issues that have a good impact to the health of Elderly.

*Mental health support services*

Mental health is a concept that indicates the good mental and emotional state of each individual. For Elderly, mental health is an important factor that directly affects physical health and quality of life, due to the characteristics of old age, the majority of the elderly need advice to balance their mood and mental stability. Mental health is a relaxed state of self. Therefore, negative emotions such as boredom, tiredness, loneliness, guilt ... also belong to mental issues, which are emotional states that seniors are most likely to encounter. Therefore, mental health services can be exchanging, sharing, talking, and helping Elderly to relieve these negative emotions.

*Psychological counseling service*

Elderly is not only experience physical problems, they may also experience many psychological problems due to the lack of environmental change, neglect and feelings of abandonment, and long-lasting powerlessness gathered into problems related to disease that are not simply shared and solved. Therefore, Elderly need more specialized psychological services to solve these problems. That is the psychological counseling service. In this service, professional staff will identify the psychological issues that seniors face; assess and analyze the severity of the problem so that, together with Elderly and their families, plan interventions to solve those negative psychological issues. If the problem is still severe, staff may need to provide a referring service for more specialized psychiatrists to conduct the intervention.

- *Legal/policy advice services*

Legal/policy advice services for Elderly need to be implemented regularly. Before receiving, the elderly will need support advice, guidance on the implementation of procedures and records prescribed by the State and the Center such as: Application to Center, resumes, records transfer, registration of temporary residence, temporary absence ... In addition, the State's policies, services and programs also need to be provided by the for Elderly and their families so they could have the most suitable decision for using services.

- *Mobilization resource services*

With the elderly care services in the community, many Elderly who have material difficulties need to be shared. Mobilizing resources from the community or mass organizations is also an expression of humanity and the sharing of people with each other in society.

- *Advocacy services, ensuring the rights of the elderly*

Advocating policies, helping Elderly speak up and their views to ensure the basic rights of Elderly thereby helping them accessing to services, bringing the best benefits to Elderly. Although Elderly is experienced people, in many cases, they are still vulnerable group. Moreover, because of their health condition, they sometimes have no conditions to express their aspirations and do not know where to guarantee their rights. Therefore, staff needs to represent and express the voice of the Elderly so that it can bring legitimate benefits to the Elderly.

- *Communication services reduce stigma*

One of the issues limiting Elderly to access and use the services is the stereotypical views, attitudes, and thoughts on Elderly access to services in grassroots centers. Families and communities still have many stereotypes related to letting parents live in care centers. This will create barriers and effectively limit interventions in support facilities. Communication

services are one of the useful methods to solve this situation. This can be done through various forms such as communication on television, newspapers, leaflets, loudspeakers and especially on the internet. Communication should also be integrated through close activities with the Elderly in the community and family such as community meetings, through community activities...

- *Support services for religious/spiritual activities*

Elderly are in great need of religion and spirituality. Statistics show that the proportion of Elderly with this need is the highest among age groups especially among Elderly. In the world, there have been many places where spiritual practices are used to intervene for the elderly, especially for mental problems. In addition to providing this service, it helps to alleviate negative emotions as well as to have comfortable emotional states that are useful for them in life.

- *Job creation/livelihood support services*

Although Elderly is declined in health and may face with many health problems, there are still many seniors who are able to work and want to work. Jobs not only bring income to seniors but it is also a demonstration that Elderly are still helpful and do not have to rely on others. Job creation assistance can recommend jobs that suit the health and abilities of the Elderly.

**Table 2: Types of community-based social services for Elderly**

Types of Service	Public facilities			Private facility	Elderly Association
	Social protection center	Social work center	Para Social worker network		
1.	X			X	
2.	X			X	X
3.	X			X	
4.		X			
5.		X			
6.		X	X		
7.		X			
8.	X	X	X	X	
9.	X			X	X
10.		X	X		

Sources: Documentary review, 2019

1. Medical support services
2. Entertainment services
3. Nutrition support services
4. Mental health support services
5. Psychological counseling services
6. Legal/policy advice services
7. Mobilization resource services

8. *Advocacy services, ensuring the rights of the elderly*
9. *Communication services reduce stigma*
10. *Support services for religious/spiritual activities*

### III. GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL SERVICES FOR ELDERLY

#### *The positive side of social services for seniors*

- There has been a greater interest in service development
- Number of community-based social service providers for the elderly is on the rise for both public and private institutions.
- The service is quite diverse to meet the different needs of the elderly
- Staffs are gradually interested in capacity building to meet the needs of elderly people for social services
- The attitude and awareness of the community has changed more positively towards the care problem of the elderly

#### *Limitations of social services for the Elderly*

- There is no facility to provide comprehensive comprehensive service packages including (Physical - Psychological - Social) as well as service delivery methods such as grassroots, family / community and Part time service
- Cultural barriers/perspectives on seniors being cared for in long-term facilities are quite serious in rural and mountainous areas.
- Psychological and social intensive services are still quite limited
- There are no services provided at home
- For some intensive services, the price is still quite high, especially those provided by private establishments.
- Service coverage is limited. Service providers are mainly concentrated in big cities and in some locations. The expansion or new establishment of service providers also faces difficulties
- Entertainment services, sports ... quite popular but not yet formed and implemented professionally
- The staff is enthusiastic, but the training is not really right with the service provided, thus limiting the effectiveness of the service.
- The recruitment of new staff with right expertise for public and private establishments still faces many difficulties
- Policies for private facilities are limited

### IV. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Thus, through a quick assessment of centers providing services to the elderly and in the world, we can see: In the world, the services provided to Elderly are very intensive and comprehensive in many respects. The services follow the direction of Interventions (Nutrition care, providing basic medical services, psychotherapy, recreational activities...). Recovery (rehabilitation services skills, counseling services for psychological support, establishment of support networks, entertainment activities) ... and Development (Career-seeking career services, appropriate activities to support the community), participating in social activities ...).

In Vietnam, service providing centers for Elderly are mainly geared towards providing nutrition, food, and medical care, creating conditions for the elderly to participate in recreational activities such as reading newspapers, watching television and spiritual activities.

It can be recognized that the current centers of social service provision for Elderly in Vietnam lack the intensive intervention services as well as flexible delivery methods. This will greatly affect the quality of life of the elderly. If the Rights-based approach is applied, the elderly are somewhat assured of the essential rights. However, other basic needs of the elderly have not been guaranteed. Therefore centers providing services to the elderly in Vietnam should:

- Organize a systematic and scientific assessment of the needs, aspirations and desires of the elderly both in the center and in the community.
- Expand and diversify types of services according to the needs and desires of the elderly
- Organize training, model visits, seminars to learn experiences about organizing services
- Need to recruit staff with deep professional qualifications for new services
- Improve the qualifications of the care team, especially the skills to work with the elderly.

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