

THE EFFECT OF GOVERNMENT PURCHASE ON THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL WORK IN WUHAN – A CASE STUDY

HAOTIAN ZHENG

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK



LOCATION: WUHAN, CHINA

Wuhan is the capital city of Hubei Province. It's home to 11 million people. Wuhan is recognized as the political, economic, financial, cultural, educational and transportation center of central China. There are 35 higher educational institutions which makes it a leading education hub for China. The concentration of higher education in the city also facilitates the development of social work in Wuhan because professors and lectures from social work departments tend to start their own social service agencies.

SOCIAL WORK IN WUHAN

As the capital city of Hubei province, Wuhan is the most progressive city in the development of social services. The development of social work in Wuhan significantly benefited from the accessibility to provincial policies, engagement from higher education, and the accessibility to financial resources. By the end of 2017, there were 90 social service agencies, more than 5,000 licensed social workers, and approximately 2 million clients served in Wuhan. The City government and the Province government have implemented systems including the purchase from the public sector and the community social workers' continuing education, in order to improve the professional identity of social work. From 2014 to 2017, the City government, along with Street Bureaus within the city, spent 7.4 million dollars purchasing services from private social service agencies. However, the large scale of purchase resulted in some problems in the advance of social work in the City.

AGENCY & COMMUNITY PARTNER

My global experience was with ISEE Social Service Center in Wuhan, China. The mission of the agency is to cultivate experienced social workers, provide quality services to communities, and advance the overall welfare of the society. Corresponding to various needs in different geographical areas, the organization displays a wide spectrum of clients, such as older adults, people with disability, youth, social organizations, and communities.

Among 32 programs in different communities, I was placed at a program purchased by L Street Bureau in 2017. The program is physically located in a Community Committee, therefore sharing the place with the Community Committee. Five social workers are assigned to the program to promote the social governance of the community and provide services to youth, women, people with disability, and older adults.



OUTCOME

- Conducted 14 interviews with 5 social workers, 2 administrative staff from the social service agency, 2 Street Bureau officials, and 2 Community Committee officials
- Coded and themed transcription of the 14 interviews.
- Conducting content analysis on the transcription of the 14 interviews.
- Assisted the program in promoting skills of program evaluation and supervisors training
- Participated in direct services to older adults, families, people with disability, and youths.

SKILLS UTILIZED/DEVELOPED

From the global independent study, I increased my ability to:

- Triangulate the information from different informants
- Strategically challenge the ambiguousness, inconsistency, and vagueness within the information
- Leverage the support of stakeholders
- Engage with a hierarchical and bureaucratic organizational context



LESSONS LEARNED

- The gap of social workers in Wuhan is increasing because of low salary, few development opportunities, heavier workload than other occupations, and the uncertain prospect of social work in China
- Social workers lack legal status to enter the community and deliver services, which resulted social workers in subordinating to Community Committee as an exchange for resources from Community Committee.
- The subordination to Community Committee undermined the forming professional identity of social workers, which decelerate social workers' self-acknowledgement.
- The component of social workers is sophisticated that the educational background could vary from less than high school diploma to a MSW degree, therefore leading to the miscommunication among social workers.



CAREER CONNECTION

Bringing back the knowledge of significance of evaluation in social work, I had the opportunity to practice my evaluation skills within the program implementation. Also, the autonomy and independence of social work in Chinese context is salient in social work development, I would like to advocate for financial and political resources towards social work in order to achieve larger scale of independence and autonomy of social work.

ADVICE

- The proficiency in language is a significant tool in conducting qualitative study, but could not guarantee the success if researchers are short of cultural competency in given cultural settings.
- A community-based study should benefit both researchers and the community being studied. Members within the community should be entitled with the access to the research design and research outcomes so as to develop the community.

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