

SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF RURAL SOCIAL WORKERS INFLUENCED BY TRAINING QUALITY, RESOURCE AVAILABILITY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES: MODERATOR ROLE OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of training quality, resource availability, and professional development opportunities on the sustainable management of rural social workers in China and investigates the moderating role of community support. Primary data were gathered from rural social workers using survey questionnaires. The relationships between training quality, resource availability, professional development opportunities, and sustainable management were analyzed through Smart PLS, focusing on community support as a moderating variable. Summarize the main results, indicating positive associations and the monitoring effect of community support. This paper emphasizes the study's contribution by providing insights into the sustainable management of social workers, which can guide policymakers. Highlights the relevance of policymakers, suggesting improvements to training, resource availability, and professional development.

Keywords: training quality, resources availability, professional development opportunities, sustainable management of rural social workers, community support

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INTRODUCTION

The management of rural social workers is one of the most important problems for China, a country that successfully developed the process of urbanization but still has numerous problems in rural areas. Hence, while the nation progresses economically, rural areas continue experiencing poverty, inferior education and healthcare, and restricted social services (Sanders and Scanlon, 2021). Rural social workers are responsible for helping with these disparities, offering services and encouraging development. However, their success and longevity are significantly affected by aspects like training, resources, and professional development. This paper aims to examine these elements' influence on the sustainable management of rural social workers in China by considering community support as a moderator. This study is especially relevant to the social services industry, which comprises many subfields, including social work, community development, and human services. Therefore, the findings of this study are useful to organizations and institutions that operate in rural development, social welfare, and public policies. The quality which is received by the trainees is central to the competence and efficacy of social workers. China also has a disconnection in the training programs that social workers undergo especially in the rural areas (Tu et al., 2022). As Brown and De Neve (2024) say, good training is an all-rounded training that offers knowledge in social education theories, skill training, and exposure to internships and field practice. However, most of the rural training programs are poor in terms of depth and experience and produce a workforce that is ill-equipped to deal with the needs of rural settings. Thus, the assessment of the effectiveness of these training programs, as well as potential outcomes regarding social workers' effectiveness and longevity in rural communities, is crucial. Resource availability is also another important element that defines the sustainability of rural social workers. Some of them, according to Almeshqab and Ustun (2019), are in the form of finances, networks and equipment to enable them to carry out their activities in the most efficient ways possible. Currently, research has shown that many rural areas in China's face serious social work practice challenges, so we found that resource scarcity is a big issue for social workers in numerous rural areas of China. Based on the following reasons, it is clear that scarcity of funds hampers the support of programs and projects developed for needy groups of people. Also, lack of access to some of the basic amenities like means of transport affect the effectiveness and successful accomplishment of tasks delegated to the social workers (Sanders and Scanlon, 2021). This shows that probability has a direct association with the abilities of those practicing social work to provide optimum and efficient consumer services, thus pointing out that the shortages can significantly have an impact on the stability of social work in community areas.

The presented training interventions are important to enhance the rural social workers' motivation and productivity. Through CPD, social workers are able to check on the formal and informal practices and knowledge in social work as well as new ideas (Hudson et al., 2021). It also has the usual benefits related to promotion opportunities, which greatly enhance both the satisfaction and the turnover rates. Thus, professional development is also a critical area of concern for Chinese

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teachers especially those practicing in rural Chinese schools for reasons as, limited access and availability of such opportunities in rural Chinese schools, inadequate financing, and scant organizational support (Shengnan and Hallinger, 2021). Such limitations can make turnover rates high and result in a high rate of burnout among social workers, eradicating the sustainability of social work endeavors. From the standpoint of examining how a certain type of professional development has affected rural social workers' sustainability, one may uncover ways in which satisfaction may be fostered and the attrition rate decreased. The other aspect in this regard, which acts as a moderating factor, is community support. It can, therefore, be argued that this is one of the ways through which the community can support social workers. The improvement of community support can complement social workers by creating a working relationship that signifies the joint efforts of social workers together with the community people in addressing social issues (Phillips et al., 2019). The degree of community support in rural China is comparatively low in general, while it is quite different, depending on the levels of numerous factors that define the success rates of social work. These roles imply that the people in the community can strengthen the practice of social work through voluntarism and social support for the available local resources and social respect (Ostrander et al., 2021).

More specifically, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the quality of training as well as the accessibility of resources and professional development options on the ability to sustain rural social workers in China. Furthermore, it is proposed to investigate the moderating effect of community support in these processes. Thus, the research aims to outline the best practices that can facilitate an improvement in the performance of the employees engaged in social work and increase their job satisfaction levels, as well as to provide recommendations to support their retention in rural workplace environments. It is also noteworthy to indicate that several egregious shortcomings in the present-day literature and practice research are addressed in this investigation. First, it focuses a particular spotlight on the characteristics of training quality affecting rural social workers, which have been ignored greatly by theories of social work. Secondly, it emphasizes the idea of resource availability. This is a factor that impacts a rural social worker greatly, yet seldom is discussed. Thirdly, the study looks at the provision of professional development, which is critical towards career development and hence staff retention, but in the rural context, it is difficult to find. Lastly, it incorporates the community support as a moderator to enable a clear analysis of how locals can improve on the sustainability of social work practices in rural China. In the next section of this study, we will look into the relevant literature review, provide a research methodology, and conduct a full empirical analysis to test the proposed hypotheses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by Manzoor et al. (2019) shows that an improvement in training quality has a positive relationship with the sustainable management of rural social workers since the social workers are prepared with the skills, knowledge and competencies needed in profit handling the multifaceted problems that are likely to prevail in the rural setting. When the theoretical and practical knowledge provided by well-structured curriculums is learned and applied by social workers, they can provide appropriate intervention techniques concerning the needs of the rural population (Mohapi, 2022). In China, especially for the rural areas with different socio-economic challenges, improved training standard produces qualified social workers to address those challenges, hence resulting in improved service delivery and impacting more on society. Improving the quality of training that is given to social workers also creates more confident and professional members of the workforce, which means less turnover. Furthermore, Alston (2020) points out that the high standard of professional training incorporated with continuing education programs helps social workers to remain current with the practices and developments, thus strengthening their efficiency to continue with their work in troubling rural settings. Thereby, it stresses the hierarchical training to produce high-quality training programs that can effectively sustain and enhance the ultimate practicality of social work in rural China and, in the end, contribute positively to the many facets of social work, such as for the social workers and the communities they serve. Therefore, we propose that.

H1: Higher training quality positively influences the sustainable management of rural social workers

More resources promoting the increase in the capacity for the sustainable management of rural social workers is vital for delivering proficient services. Financial necessities, supplies and transportation and other accessories that are useful for performing their duties in an efficient manner provide enough aid to solve the complex issues of the rural areas for social workers (Almeshqab and Ustun, 2019). In China, for instance, the lack of resources is cited as one of the main issues affecting the health facilities in rural areas and, consequently, access to social work services. Resource availability, according to Sanders and Scanlon (2021), therefore, guarantees that the would-be beneficiaries are accessed by the social workers; those who suffer from such social injustices are provided with detailed services that include individual and community development solutions to social problems. It also leads to increased satisfaction with the job and the corresponding reduction of turnover levels in the profession for social workers practicing in facilities with adequate resources. Also, excellent funding activities in schools help in recruiting personnel with the right qualities to practice social work in rural areas (Berg-Weger, 2019). Due to such support and the availability of resources for social workers, the issue of social work interventions in rural areas becomes more sustainable as the practice results in better social outcomes and the well-being of the community. Therefore, we make a hypothesis that.

H2: Greater resource availability positively influences the sustainable management of rural social workers

Bascopé et al. (2019) find that a more specific focus on the professional development of the rural social workers leads to more positive impacts on the fourth perspective of sustainable management. The ability to attend workshop sessions, seminars, disaster management, and other training provides one with flowing knowledge and relation to the other practitioners on matters concerning practice, research, and innovation, among others. It also fosters their competency and

capacity to resolve the special and emerging dynamic complexities of rural settings. Rural social workers in China report rather similar challenges of professional isolation and limited resources when it comes to practicing social work (Dominelli, 2021). Thus, Berg-Weger (2019) shows that professional development enables them to avoid feelings of impotence and demotivation. They also lead to higher job satisfaction because social workers receive appreciation and recognition from their employing agencies for the pursuit of change and improvement. Also, sustained training empowers the retention of professional social workers in rural facilities and organizations which in turn guarantees effective and quality services by such human resource (Roumpi et al., 2020). Indeed, funding specialization results in rich benefits to rural social work practice; enhancing rural social workers' professional development directly improves their job performance, job satisfaction, and long-term retention in their relatively understaffed regions, and therefore, sustainably improves the quality of social work provided to rural communities. Therefore, we say that.

H3: More professional development opportunities positively influence the sustainable management of rural social workers

Community support influences the relationship between training quality and sustainable management of the rural social workers through increased practical application of the competency acquired through training. As highlighted above, Masis et al. (2021) points, when rural social workers get the backing of a great community, the enhancement of high-quality training is greatly boosted. This support entails partnership, availing of local information as well as other core requisites that are relevant in the provision of services. As in the Chinese context, active stakeholder participation fosters the application of social work training since it fosters a culture that is sensitive to social workers' practice (Yuen-Tsang and Wang, 2020). Rose and Palattiyil (2020) Show that support from the community also leads to a feeling of being a team player in tackling problems and thus increases the motivation and morale of the social workers. This synergy guarantees that all the advantages of training are accrued hence positively impacting on the delivery of services and sustainability of social interventions in rural settings. Therefore, community support becomes vital in bridging the gap between quality training and sustainable results that translate to serve the rural social worker and deprived rural communities. Therefore, we propose that

H4: Community support moderates the relationship between training quality and sustainable management of rural social workers

Availability of resources has a positive effect on the management of rural social workers with an influence of community support, which increases the efficacy of resources (Hadley and McGrath, 2021). When the officials, local authorities, other individuals and stakeholders within the rural settings support the efforts of the social workers then enhanced results are achieved relative to finances, structures and other essential supplies and commodities. Yu et al. (2021) find that active participation in the community in China assists social workers in optimizing such resources with community partners, knowledge from other social workers, and other volunteers. This support can be some of the informal resources that can complement the formal resources like transport, place for service provision, and local fundraising. Another advantage of community support relates to the improvement of cooperation regarding better resource utilization in the company and innovations in the delivery of services. In this manner, there is the optimization of resource use, which makes social work services more proactive, dependable and of better quality, hence making them better and efficient (Gupta et al., 2022). Therefore, there is a need to encourage community support in an effort to enhance the implementation of resources available in promoting the practice of social work in rural areas to the benefit of the social worker and the society at large. Therefore, we say that.

H5: Community support moderates the relationship between resource availability and sustainable management of rural social workers

Community support offsets the correlation between professional development opportunities and the sustainable management of rural social workers by accelerating the relevance and effectiveness of the opportunities. Wu and Sun (2020) say that a lack of competition and good support from the Chinese government as well as from the communities the social workers work in also guarantees that there is good assimilation of the new skills and knowledge gained from the professional development. Members of the community would help in the organization of local workshops and training sessions with peer learning forums, thus promoting learning (Chow et al., 2021). This support assists in offsetting the level of loneliness that social workers from rural areas have to endure, thus supporting the culture of learning together. In addition, the acknowledgement by the community and encouragement helps the social workers' morale and increases their chances of acquiring and reaping from the opportunities of continuing education (Jordan, 2022). Consequently, it can be inferred that the provision of professional development support, together with strong community backing, results in charged and efficiently managed social workers who are equipped to face the problems specific to the county's rural settings. Therefore, we make a hypothesis that.

H6: Community support moderates the relationship between professional development opportunities and sustainable management of rural social workers

RESEARCH METHODS

The study investigates the impact of training quality, resources availability and professional development opportunities on the sustainable management of rural social workers and also investigates the moderating role of community support on the association of training quality, resources availability, professional development opportunities and sustainable management of rural social workers in China. The article gathers the primary data from social workers using survey questionnaires. The items were used to measure the understudy constructs such as training quality is measured with six items (Dhar, 2015), resources availability is measured with four items (Wang et al., 2018), professional development opportunities is measured with five questions (Prenger et al., 2017), community support is measured with four questions (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011) and sustainable management of rural social workers is measured with five items (Adebanjo et al., 2016). These items are given in

Table 1. The study selected the social workers of the registered social firms in China as the respondents. These social workers are selected based on simple random sampling. The surveys were distributed to the social workers by personal visits.

Table 1. Variables and items

Items	Statements	Sources
Training Quality		
TQ1	My manager can be counted on to help me develop the skills emphasized in training programmes.	Dhar, 2015
TQ2	I can expect my manager to assign me special projects that require me to use the skills and knowledge emphasized in training.	
TQ3	My manager enthusiastically supports my participation in training programmes.	
TQ4	My manager believes advising or training are one of his or her major job responsibilities.	
TQ5	I would not hesitate to tell my manager of a training need I have in a particular area.	
TQ6	My manager makes sure I get the training needed to remain effective in my job.	
Resources Availability		
RA1	Our firm owns sufficient human resources to implement environmental management practices.	Wang et al., 2018
RA2	Our firm owns sufficient financial resources to implement environmental management practices.	
RA3	Our firm owns adequate physical resources to implement environmental management practices.	
RA4	Our firm owns sufficient intangible assets to implement environmental management practices.	
Professional Development Opportunities		
PDO1	We work together.	Prenger et al., 2017
PDO2	People can trust each other.	
PDO3	People keep their word.	
PDO4	People sincerely interested in each other.	
PDO5	We trust completely in each other's capacities when	
Community Support		
CS1	Most important industries for my community.	Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011
CS2	Help my community grow in the right direction.	
CS3	Continue to play an important economic role.	
CS4	Proud that social workers are coming to my community	
Sustainable Management of Rural Social Workers		
SMRSW1	Social workers are managed through quality training.	Adebanjo et al., 2016
SMRSW2	Social Workers are involved in the training.	
SMRSW3	Social Workers have enough resources to manage their work.	
SMRSW4	Social Workers have professional opportunities.	
SMRSW5	Social Workers have community support.	

A total of 502 surveys were distributed but only 290 valid surveys were received. These valid surveys have 57.77 percent response rate. The article also checks the association among variables using smart-PLS. It is a commonly used tool for the analysis of primary data and give the best results even the researchers used large data sets (Hair Jr et al., 2020). The study used three predictors named training quality (TQ), resources availability (RA) and professional development opportunities (PDO), one moderating variable named community support (CS) and one dependent variable named sustainable management of rural social workers (SMRSW). Figure 1 shows these variables.

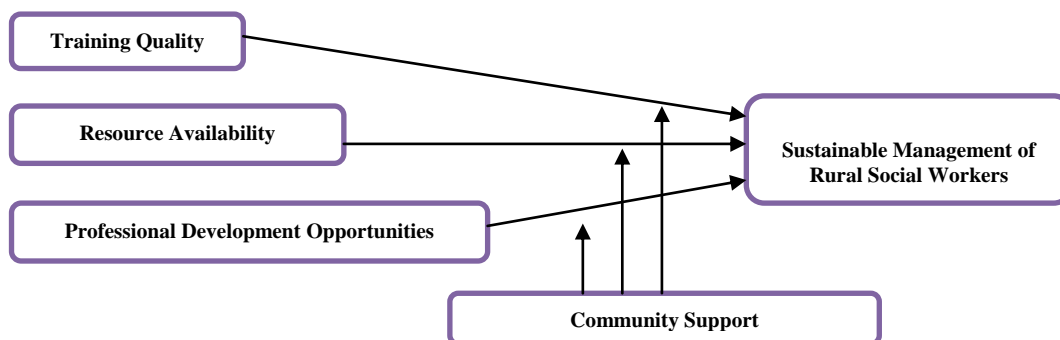


Figure 1. Research model

Research Findings

The study checks the convergent validity that shows the correlation between items. The outcomes revealed that the Alpha and composite reliability (CR) values are not less than 0.70. In addition, the outcomes also revealed that the factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) values are not less than 0.50. These figures exposed a high correlation between items and valid convergent validity. Table 2 shows these values. The study checks the discriminant validity that shows the correlation between variables. The outcomes revealed that the Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) ratio is not larger than 0.85. These figures expose a low correlation among variables and valid discriminant validity. Table 3 shows these values. The outcomes revealed that the training quality, resources availability and professional development opportunities have a positive association with sustainable management of rural social workers in China and accept H1, H2 and H3.

Table 2. Convergent validity

Constructs	Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
Community Support	CS1	0.864	0.899	0.929	0.767
	CS2	0.878			
	CS3	0.883			
	CS4	0.878			
Professional Development Opportunities	PDO1	0.796	0.852	0.891	0.621
	PDO2	0.792			
	PDO3	0.738			
	PDO4	0.790			
	PDO5	0.821			
Resources Availability	RA1	0.623	0.803	0.853	0.599
	RA2	0.906			
	RA3	0.891			
	RA4	0.626			
Sustainable Management of Rural Social Workers	SMRSW1	0.801	0.878	0.911	0.672
	SMRSW2	0.834			
	SMRSW3	0.852			
	SMRSW4	0.770			
	SMRSW5	0.839			
Training Quality	TQ1	0.852	0.903	0.925	0.674
	TQ2	0.810			
	TQ3	0.810			
	TQ4	0.783			
	TQ5	0.857			
	TQ6	0.811			

Table 3. Discriminant validity

	CS	PDO	RA	SMRSW	TQ
CS					
PDO	0.123				
RA	0.768	0.155			
SMRSW	0.437	0.179	0.444		
TQ	0.470	0.086	0.506	0.549	

Table 4. Path analysis

Relationships	Beta	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
CS -> SMRSW	0.213	0.068	3.124	0.002
PDO -> SMRSW	0.102	0.043	2.378	0.019
RA -> SMRSW	0.182	0.065	2.784	0.006
TQ -> SMRSW	0.378	0.055	6.810	0.000
CS x RA -> SMRSW	0.193	0.061	3.150	0.002
CS x PDO -> SMRSW	0.096	0.043	2.264	0.026
CS x TQ -> SMRSW	0.095	0.047	2.037	0.044

Finally, the outcomes also exposed that community support significantly moderates the association of training quality, resource availability, professional development opportunities and sustainable management of rural social workers in China and accept H4, H5 and H6. These associations are given in Table 4.

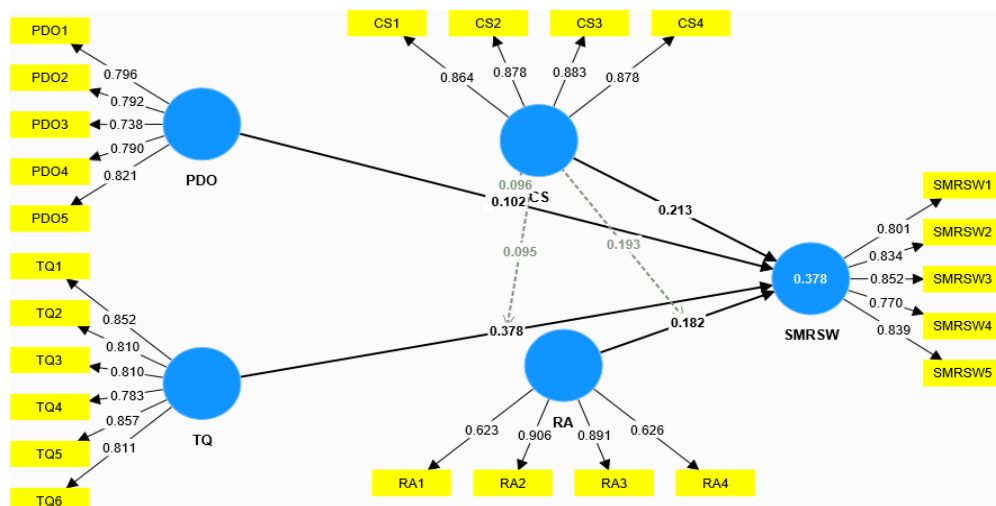


Figure 2. Measurement assessment model

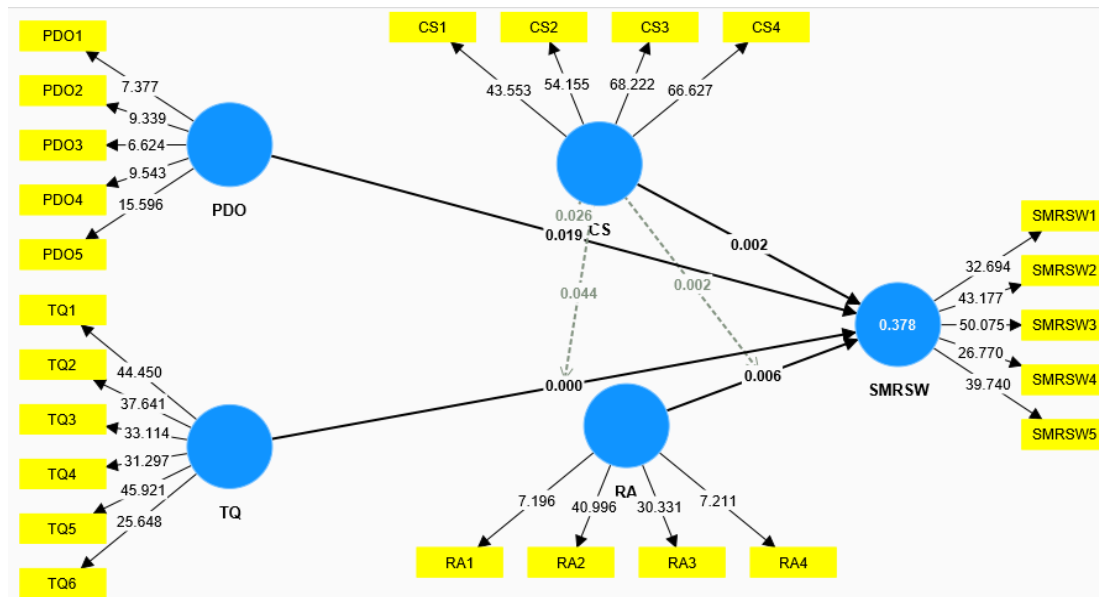


Figure 3. Structural assessment model

DISCUSSION

The nature of the retention of rural social workers in China means that there are certain key areas that are deficient and these include training standard, resources and professional development. This paper examines factors that affect the impact and durability of social workers in rural China with an aim to investigate the mediating influence of community support. These results affirm the complex nature of these influences and emphasize the significance of support as a factor that has the greatest moderating effect on the utilization of services in relation to each of the individual variables. The study finds that professional competence is a critical component that influences the quality of training among social workers. This way, high-quality training prepares social workers to meet the competencies, skills and knowledge needed to solve social problems confronted by rural communities (Kangasniemi et al., 2022). It was found by studies like Liang et al. (2020) that in China, the hours spent on training and the training content, particularly in rural areas, differ greatly, which in turn contributes to inconsistencies in terms of social workers' preparedness. Indeed, this research establishes that although excellence in training is required, it is community support that will considerably enhance the training outcomes. Depending on the communities' input of local knowledge, resources and participation in the actual problem solving, the effects of training are magnified (Yet et al., 2022).

This way, the training becomes more relevant to the needs of the population since it is based on the scenario of the given community. On the other hand, Fulton and Doussard (2023) find that even the most resourceful training initiatives can be compromised if there is a lack of community backing since sociologists cannot fully deploy all their skills in supporting the community. The study finds that resource availability is one of the other constructs that affect the sustainability of rural social workers. The input resources consist of cash and other forms of support in addition to facilities, equipment, and supplies required for efficient service provision. Social workers working in rural areas of China have a major problem of lack of resources, which hamper them in their work (Sanders and Scanlon, 2021). This paper shows that having the resources is not enough, adequate support from the community can complement and even increase the use and effectiveness of these resources. Communities that support social workers may also come in and close gaps by offering manpower via volunteering, community raising awareness, as well as utilizing local resources (Oni-Eseleh et al., 2023). For instance, from the community, members can give transport and accommodation to needy clients or another shelter where services can be rendered, hence increasing the support base of social workers. These complementary choices mean that it is possible for social workers to get the most out of scarce resources, which in turn enhances the delivery of standard services. However, in areas that are not well-supported, scarcity is felt in its worst form, which hinders the realization of the social work intervention efforts. Pithouse (2019) Points out that it is necessary to provide professional continuance education for social workers in order to keep them interested and productive. In this way, professional development guarantees updated practices and theories and new ideas in the field of social work. Moreover, it offers promotion prospects, which likewise greatly enhance employee satisfaction and decrease turnover rates.

However, professional development opportunities are scarce, especially in rural China areas where the schools are located far from each other, there is no funding to support professional development, and there is inadequate organizational support. In this case, this research postulates that community support may offer important moderation in the analyzed situation. The society can facilitate the kind of environment that enhances learning and training of social workers can be facilitated by communities that promote the profession (Kuusisto et al., 2024). For instance, community organizations may be used to make available workshop, training, and peer learning. Also, soldiers receive social appreciation and recognition from those around them, which, depending on the context, can motivate people and compensate for the lack of active professional development. Such communal support, according to Jia and Li (2022), ensures that there is retention of social workers practicing in the country's large areas, hence fewer cases of burnout and high turnover. When social workers lack such support, the situation may lead to being isolated and/or not valued, which in turn results in low morale and high turnover. In addition, the study finds that aspects such as

the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of rural China make these dynamics rather intricate. With this, accessing and implementing effective social services may be relatively easy for social workers due to the strong adherence to norms and practices by the people in these regions. Castro-Arce and Vanclay (2020) tells those socio-political policies, especially those declared in rural development and social services, can deliver required financial support and facilities. In contrast, the policies that disregard rural areas and social services can worsen existing difficulties. The study also finds that technological development is also a factor that has both prospects and issues in the representation of rural Chinese social workers. Technology tools and solutions can enrich service provision, conduct training and professional development of social workers and other personnel, improve the communication and cooperation between social workers and citizens (Lolich et al., 2019).

Implications

The findings presented in this study have significant policy implications for China's policymakers, instructors in social work education programs, and leaders of communities. This emphasizes that resources should be directed towards very effective and sound training of the rural social workers, adequate resource provision and timely professional development for the purpose. This means that policymakers should pay special attention to the development of supportive policies and the raising of funding for such sectors. This paper, therefore, has highlighted the need for training institutions to come up with specific context training curricula to meet the needs of rural social workers. Moreover, enhancing community support plays a vital role because it multiplies both the strength and efficiency of the social work undertaken. When this paper's findings are applied successfully, stakeholders can enhance social service provision, increase social worker retention and job satisfaction, and nurture the growth of rural societies. It means that integrating such a broad approach can level the service gap between the urban environment and the rural one, providing everyone with equal chances for social success and, generally, increasing the quality of their lives. The study guides the regulators in establishing regulations related to enhance the sustainable management of rural social workers using effective training quality, quality resources availability and effective professional development opportunities.

Limitations

There is some complexity in the generalization of the findings of this study, and hence, the following limitations of the study can be noted. Firstly, it mainly employs a qualitative approach and, in this case, can be very limited due to the fact that it might not elicit all the factors that define the sustainability of rural social workers. Secondly, it is area-specific research confined to a few areas within China, and as such, the results may not extend to other regions that have different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Thirdly, in the present work, issues of temporal dynamics and long-term consequences cannot be clarified due to the cross-sectional research design. Also, it is very probable that some external factors that may affect the study findings have not been captured fully, such as changes in government policies or shifts in economic force. Therefore, future work should include comparative studies with other time points to support and complement the findings of the present research, as well as to increase the geographical generalizability of the rural social work sustainability determinants. This approach may also assist in targeting specific types of rural facilities since the focus is on developing solutions according to the needs of specific rural environments.

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