

# Research on the Present Situation and Countermeasures of Community Education Public Service for Children Aged 0-3 Years in Xi'an\*

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**Abstract**—Community early education public service system is an important part of the national public service system construction. It is an irresistible trend to fully integrate public education, health and community resources to provide the community inclusive services for guiding parents in early childhood education. There are many problems in public early education service in Xi'an as follows: there are few community public early education service centers; the service is targeted at only a limited scope of people and inclusive services provided are few and infrequent; the service content emphasizes the theory preaching but undervalues the method and procedural practice guidance; parents lack information sources of public early education service and the information they get lacks broad coverage and timeliness. To effectively solve the problems, measures can be taken as follows: through resource integration, encouraging communities where conditions permit to give priority to setting up public service stations for children aged 0-3 years; following up with policies and establishing a policy guarantee system for community education public services for children aged 0-3 years; encouraging multi-participation to improve the quantity and quality of public welfare early education guidance services for children aged 0-3 years; putting talents first and encouraging qualified colleges and universities to train teachers specialized in early education; building an online sharing platform for public early education resources by use of the mobile internet.

**Keywords**—Xi'an; children aged 0-3; community education; public service

## I. INTRODUCTION

The population of children aged 0 to 3 in China has exceeded 60 million. With the comprehensive opening of the two-child policy, the annual increase of the birth population has reached 3 million, and the contradiction between the social demand of child care for children aged 0-3 years old and the imperfect public service system has become increasingly prominent. In 2011, the "Outline of Chinese

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Children's Development (2011-2020)" clearly proposed for the first time that "Scientific child-rearing guidance should be actively carried out for children aged 0-3 years old. In 2013, the Ministry of Education launched the pilot work of early education for children aged 0-3 years, requiring that "efforts should be made to stick to the basic direction of public welfare and universal benefits and fully integrate public education, health and community resources, and guide the early education service system for infants and young children in communities. In 2017, the "Opinions of the Ministry of Education and Other Four Departments on the Implementation of the Third Preschool Education Action Plan" proposed once again to "encourage early education agencies with conditions to provide parents and the community with public welfare early education guidance for children aged 0-3. Community early education public service system is an important part of the construction of national public service system. [1]

The number of children aged 0-3 in Shaanxi Province is about 700,000, among which only 200,000 receive professional early education, according to the upper bound of 1/3 of the total. [2] In order to accelerate the development of early education for 0-3 years old and preschool education of "integration of 0-6 years old childcare" in Xi'an, the research group carried out a field survey on "the development of community education public services for children aged 0-3 years old" in six major urban areas of Xi'an. Basic understanding of the main communities 0-3 years old infant public service development status and problems are gained, providing a realistic basis for carrying out public services for 0-3 children in the city, and at the same time having a strong policy-oriented and practical role on how to build preschool education public service system in accordance with local conditions in this region.

## II. PRESENT SITUATION AND PROBLEMS OF PUBLIC EARLY EDUCATION SERVICES IN COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN AGED 0-3 YEARS OLD IN XI'AN

### A. *Community Public Early Education Service Centers Are Yet to Be Established, with Multiple Departments Participating in the Service*

According to the investigation, interviews and network inquiries, there are very few specialized early education guidance service centers for children aged 0-3 set up by community and street administrative departments in Xi'an. In Baqiao district, the early education center for population and Montessori enlightenment early education center have been established relying on the front of family planning service station. And the Population and Family Planning Bureau in Weiyang district have set up eighteen different types of early education bases. The education administration departments of various districts have not set up the early education guidance service stations for the 0-3 years old with the nature of public service and universal benefit. At present, the public welfare early education guidance and services for children aged 0-3 years old mainly include child-rearing lecture halls relying on public kindergartens and parent-child parks, free lectures and parent-child activities with marketing characteristics in private early education centers and childcare centers; guidance on family education for children aged 0-3 years carried out by the Health Commission relying on the Maternal and Child Health Care Hospital; as well as the maternal and perinatal health care, comprehensive infant education program for 0-3 years old carried out by departments like Municipal Civil Affairs Bureau, the city women's federation, the municipal population and family planning commission and its subordinate municipal family planning association, municipal government and women and children working committee of each district, etc.

By contrast, Shanghai, Guangdong, Beijing, Nanjing and other cities have set up administrative and community early education guidance service centers or stations. The public education service centers for 0-3-year-old infants and young children in Xi'an are obviously not matched with its status as a new first-tier city. In addition, the participation of multiple departments in the service shows the significance of the work and its function of integrating multiple resources, yet the overlapping service items and contents resulted in by unclear division of labor and the effectiveness of the preach-style service need to be verified.

### B. *Status Quo of the Service Content in Community Public Education for Children Aged 0-3 Years in Xi'an*

1) *There are many targeted objects and few and infrequent inclusive services provided in public early education services:*

Xi'an advocates that qualified public kindergartens should undertake certain public welfare early education services. More than half of the kindergartens participated in the pilot work of integrated childcare for children aged 0-6 launched in Shaanxi Province in 2007. According to the survey on the status quo of public welfare early education services for 0-3 years old for parents and communities in

kindergartens in Shaanxi carried out by the Third Basic Education Office of Shaanxi Education Department, nearly half of the kindergartens often provide early education services and guidance for parents and the community, and are willing to open the game facilities to the community once a week, and the community also provides family parenting guidance services. Some kindergartens provide childcare services to the families of school-age children in the community by opening nursery classes and parent-child kindergartens, and some kindergartens also hold regular preaching and parent-child activities for other families of 0-3 years old children in the community. Such service is of public welfare and inclusiveness, but since it only targets at a very limited part of objects, the influence is utterly inadequate.

Secondly, for the purpose of marketing and expanding popularity, commercial for-profit early education institutions and childcare institutions also provide public welfare early education services in March and September of each year for the peak enrollment season, by inviting well-known experts and scholars in the early education field to carry out large-scale early education lectures. This kind of service can reach a number of several hundred to one thousand people, and the service target is usually the existing customers and potential customers of the early education center, completely for free or charging a very small fee. Major early education centers also regularly carry out non-profit classroom activities for parents and online micro-parenting classes for registered users. Such services should be regarded as after-sales services in the strict sense since parents need to buy classes before they can enjoy them.

Compared with the above two types, early education services for children aged 0-3 years provided by other departments, such as the National Health and Family Planning Commission and the Women's Federation have wide coverage in that they target all pregnant women and school-age children in the district and are various in forms. For example, "Lectures of early education for populations" and "Growth lectures for new moms" etc. pay attention to the early education requirements of migrant population and grandparents and carry out targeted services. But due to the uneven distribution of health and education resources at district level, the main urban districts, such as Weiyang district, Baqiao district, Lianhu district, etc., take the lead in carrying out many services, while Chang'an district, Yanliang district, Lintong district and other regions develop slowly in this respect.

2) *Public early education services emphasize the theory preaching but undervalue the method and procedural practice guidance:*

According to the survey, the institutions providing public early education services for children aged 0-3 years old have the following characteristics in the content setting. First of all, the importance of early education is publicized from the basic aspects of children's physical and psychological characteristics. Kindergartens, professional early education institutions and childcare institutions provide more formal and scientific services, relying on human resources of universities or research scholars. This kind of service has

fixed site and ideal teaching environment and equipment, and is very theoretical and penetrated by practical and procedural methods. Secondly, the population and family planning departments and other departments pay attention to the early education of pregnant and lying-in women and the physical and mental health care of children aged 0-3 years. For example, the working committee on women and children in Beilin district provides free "Xi'an Maternal and Child Health Manual" for pregnant women and children aged 0-3 years; and community health service centers provide services such as tracking the physical development of children aged 0-3 years and regular physical examination.

To sum up, public early education services are mainly based on knowledge lectures and consulting services, and lack personalized services for special families. Currently, there is basically no household guidance. Moreover, due to the lack of venues and facilities, there is a serious shortage of guidance and training on methods, practical parenting skills, theories and practices, and it is difficult for parents to translate the concept of short-term surprise into the daily routine of scientific parenting in a short period of time.

3) *Parents' information sources of the public early education service lack wide coverage and timeliness:*

Public early education service information in Xi'an for 0-3 years old mainly comes from the following sources. First, pregnant women are required to participate in the compulsory publicity of pregnancy health care and early education at specified times by the hospital where their files are established, and they are notified and registered through oral notification by doctors and public accounts of the hospital. Second, public early education services provided by kindergartens and early education agencies are informed to targeted objects through WeChat group and other information channels, as well as the tweets of early education and parenting public accounts. However, very few parents know the information of activities sponsored by health and statistics bureau, street communities and so on in that they have too few ways for propaganda and the specialized informationization.

#### *C. Current Situation of Public Education Service Policy and System Guarantee for 0-3-year-old Children in Xi'an*

Document No. 15 of the General Office of the State Council [2019] "Guidance on promoting the development of child care services for infants less than 3 years of age" is the latest policy on children aged 0-3 years old. In recent ten years, provinces and cities like Shanghai, Beijing, Nanjing, Fujian, Sichuan have successively issued special policy documents on regulating the management of early education agencies and the early education of 0-3-year-old children, but such policies and regulations in Xi'an and even Shaanxi province have not been unveiled yet. The policies and regulations related to 0-3 years old in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province are only scattered in the three-year action plan for preschool education, Health and family planning commission work points and planning and the documents of the working committees on women and children in municipal and provincial level. "Xi'an children's development plan (2011-

2020)" proposes to promote the comprehensive early development of children aged 0-3 years. With just one sentence, there is no detailed plan on how to promote its comprehensive development. Therefore, it is urgent for Shaanxi Province and Xi'an to promulgate specialized policies and regulations on 0-3-year-old children, which are in line with the document spirit of the General Office of the State Council and keep up with other similar provinces and cities.

### **III. STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE EXPANSION OF COMMUNITY PUBLIC EDUCATION SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AGED 0-3 YEARS IN XI'AN**

#### *A. Making Good Use of Resources Through Encouraging Communities Where Conditions Permit to Give Priority to Setting up Public Service Stations for Children Aged 0-3 Years*

Through interviews and surveys, it is found that the community has the following difficulties in providing public services for children aged 0-3 years: in the absence of administrative orders and policy guidance, the community street departments have no awareness of carrying out public services for children aged 0-3 years; there are no specialized activity and education venues for children aged 0-3 years old, or there are venues yet without corresponding facilities; the community lacks full-time and part-time human resources for early education services for 0-3 years old in that at present, the professional composition of community service centers is mainly social service and other majors, and the number of staff with educational background, especially preschool education background, is almost zero. Therefore, through the evaluation and analysis of the public education service ability of the communities for children aged 0-3 years old in Xi'an, it is suggested that the administrative department for education be defined as the government administrative department of early education service. An early education service platform in Xi'an can be built based on the "government purchase mode" to provide services for children aged 0-3 and their families. The early education service platforms in Xi'an can be established in the "City-district-community" three-level management model, that is, Xi'an children's early education guidance platform, district-level children's early education guidance center and children's early education guidance station in communities. Priority should be given to setting up public service stations for children aged 0-3 years in conditional communities.

#### *B. Following Up with Policies and Establishing a Policy Guarantee System for Community Education Public Services for Children Aged 0-3 Years*

First of all, the existing policy guarantee for children aged 0-3 should be improved and refined. It is necessary to improve the content of "Xi'an Children's Development Regulations (2011-2020)" on the development of early education guidance for 0-3 years old, promote the promulgation of policies and regulations such as "Xi'an Guidelines on Early Education for Children Aged 0-3 Years Old" and "Opinions on Accelerating the Development of

Childcare Services for Children Under 3 Years Old in Xi'an" and gradually build a policy education system. Second, special education funds should be set up for 0-3 years old. In the three-year preschool education plan of Shaanxi Province, it is proposed that each year, 100 million yuan should be planned to be invested from the provincial budget and 100 million yuan from the special financial fund of the province, that is, a total of 200 million yuan, which should be invested in the development of preschool education, mainly to support the construction of urban and rural kindergartens and the one-year free preschool education. [3] It calls for the cooperation of the community sub-district civil affairs departments, education departments, health and family planning departments and women's federations that the public education services for 0-3 years old rely on, so as to realize the intensification of decentralized services and maximize and focus the use of funds of all parties.

*C. Encouraging Multi-participation to Improve the Quantity and Quality of Public Welfare Early Education Guidance Services for Children Aged 0-3 Years*

*1) Establishing incentive mechanism for non-profit early education guidance services for 0-3 years old:*

Incentive mechanism for non-profit early education guidance services for 0-3 years old should be established to attract kindergartens, early education institutions and communities to expand the coverage of public welfare early education, and to increase the number of services. Among them, it is necessary to give full play to the role of demonstrative kindergartens in early education and social services for children aged 0 to 3, and develop demonstrative kindergartens into research bases for early education and social services for children aged 0 to 3. [4] Public kindergartens should truly implement the pilot and demonstration work of community early education. Research shows that the pilot work of early education for children aged 0-3 in public kindergartens in Xi'an has made no progress, with few students and not enough positive work for parents has been done. With just the label of pilot kindergarten, many haven't set about the work, not even to mention playing a leading role for others. Government-run kindergartens should focus on solving the problems of insufficient financial support, lack of professional teachers, low parental participation, and shortage of school buildings. For example, it is within their capacity to open game facilities to the community once a week through government purchase of services, alliance with commercial early education centers, early childhood education groups and other institutions.

Secondly, commercial early education centers and childcare services with low fees and good social impact should be encouraged through tax exemption and subsidy per student. Against the background of the integration of childcare and the construction of public resources for pre-school education, it is necessary to gradually carry out the identification of the universality of early education institutions, and implement government subsidies for all students without discrimination. The government should share the financial burden of early education and child care.

Early education agencies should be encouraged to carry out public welfare lectures and parent-child activities publicity. Qualified communities can provide free or low-cost preaching venues, facilities and equipment, and even provide corresponding materials, while early education agencies can provide experts and experienced human resources. Early education agencies should be encouraged to release free public lectures on expert parenting through the Internet, WeChat official accounts and other platforms, or broadcast lectures live, so as to benefit more families.

*2) Building a community expert base and volunteer team for early education guidance for 0-3 years old:*

Community 0-3 year's old early education guidance expert pool and volunteer team need to be established to provide adequate human resources network for community public early education services. On the one hand, the leading role of preschool education and early education experts and professors in colleges and universities should be given full play to, and relevant student resources should be explored for volunteer service; on the other hand, enthusiastic caregivers with baby experience should be actively encouraged to be volunteers. Shaanxi Province has guided and cultivated projects related to early education and organized professional teacher training under the guidance of experts and scholars of the preschool education research association; launched the "building hundreds of kindergartens and cultivating thousands of preschool teachers" campaign to create a new ecological environment for early education in communities; and carried out the special training for early education teachers on infant development evaluation, etc.

*D. Putting Talents First and Encouraging Qualified Colleges and Universities to Train Teachers Specialized in Early Education*

The public service system for 0-3-year-old children needs not only guidance and guarantee of policies, special financial subsidies, and full cooperation of various departments and institutions, but also professional early education talents. However, the cultivation of early education professionals in China lags behind. Undergraduate normal colleges and universities rarely offer early education majors, while higher normal vocational schools offer early education majors or early education directions in preschool education majors. [5] At present, almost all the teachers working in kindergarten nursery classes, nursery education centers and early education centers are graduates of preschool education or other majors, and there are no professional early education talents available in community street service centers and community early education service stations. Therefore, adhering to the concept of talents first, qualified colleges and universities should grasp the golden period of childcare and early education in China in recent ten years, create conditions for the establishment of early education majors, and realize the two major functions of talents training and serving social needs in colleges and universities. The support of professional early education teacher training in colleges and universities and the exploration of the role of community education service of preschool education and early education specialty in colleges and universities contribute to providing

reliable community public education services for children aged 0-3 years old.

#### *E. Building an Online Sharing Platform for Public Early Education Resources by Use of Mobile Internet*

Internet technology should be utilized to build an online sharing platform for public early education resources based on community street early education public service agencies. It is necessary to use the Internet platform to release timely information of early education and child-rearing activities that are generally beneficial and for public welfare, so as to provide parents with information sources of early education guidance and help, and broaden their access to scientific child-rearing channels. And it is also needed to popularize the early education knowledge of "cultivation + education + health care" by improving the information resources of the platform. This online sharing platform, together with offline community early education guidance stations, runs parent-centered early education sharing sessions, rural early education service stations and special assistance programs for special children, etc. They work in coordination in accordance with local conditions, actively promoting the popularization of early education knowledge in urban and rural areas.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Community early education public service system serves as an important part of the construction of national public service system. The care, rearing and Nursery services for children aged 0-3 years are not only related to people's livelihood, but also related to the basic education of the country. Relevant theoretical and practical research on public services for children aged 0-3 years and national macro-policy guidance have shown that, "Gradually establishing community-based early childhood service network" [6] is one of the important tasks for the government to construct public services in today's world and even in China. In the rapid urbanization and population expansion of Xi'an, which has become a new first-tier city, there is still a long way to go for preschool education, especially public education services related to 0-3 children. However, what is glad to see is that relevant experts, scholars, front-line childcare workers and college teachers in Shaanxi Province are paying attention to this field and putting forward reasonable suggestions. The REAP team (rural education action plan), consisting of scholars and experts from Stanford University of the United States, Shaanxi Normal University and the National Health Commission of People's Republic of China, has carried out the project called "Nurturing the Future" in the rural areas of southern Shaanxi, and the nurture center has been built in the village. The documentary "Babies" shows the real situation of parenting and skip-generation nurturing in the project, which is being carried out continuously in rural Shaanxi Province. Therefore, it needs further study and practice for Xi'an, with the help of various forces, to make sure that children aged 0-3 years old can receive the care, upbringing and care that parents can trust and benefit from in the nearby community, provide parents with practical and operational scientific approaches to parenting and provide safe and

friendly spaces for children and caregivers to convey the concept of scientific parenting, and ensure children to be cared and raised properly.

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