

# A Study on the Pension Issue of Older Migrant Workers in the Construction Industry under the Social Governance of the New Era

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**Abstract:** *As China's population ages and urbanization progresses, the size of the elderly migrant worker population continues to expand, and the difficulties they face in providing for their retirement are becoming increasingly prominent. Based on the social governance of the new era, this article systematically analyzes the difficulties faced by elderly migrant workers in the construction industry through field visits and questionnaire surveys in Yibin, Chengdu, and Luzhou, combined with online context and policy guidance. It also explores solutions from the perspectives of policy support, social care, and personal development, hoping to provide reference for improving the elderly migrant workers' living conditions and promoting harmonious social development.*

**Keywords:** Social governance, Construction industry, Elderly migrant workers, Elderly care dilemma.

## 1. Introduction

Since the beginning of reform and opening up, migrant workers, as the core driving force of China's urbanization, have played an irreplaceable and significant role in the country's modernization drive. Currently, the majority of migrant workers are employed in basic jobs in industries such as construction and manufacturing. However, with the accelerated aging of the population and the transformation of industrial structures, the proportion of "elderly migrant workers" aged 50 and above has been rising annually. According to the "2024 Migrant Worker Monitoring Survey Report" released by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2024, the number of migrant workers aged 50 and above increased from 26.4% to 31.6% between 2022 and 2024. 44.7% of these workers were employed in the secondary industry, with construction accounting for 14.3%. However, the proportion of migrant workers covered by pension insurance in the construction industry is lower than in other sectors. According to the "2024 Migrant Worker Monitoring Survey Report," the average monthly income for this group is less than 6,000 yuan, and over 60% do not contribute to urban employee pension insurance (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). National data shows that the proportion of migrant workers participating in the basic urban employee pension insurance is relatively low. At present, in the context of social governance in the new era emphasizing "co-construction, co-governance and sharing", the pension security and sustainable development of elderly migrant workers have become a social issue that needs to be urgently addressed.

Currently, most research focuses on the broader framework of employment support and social integration for migrant workers, but specific analysis of the retirement issues facing the specific subgroup of older migrant workers in the construction industry remains insufficient. Furthermore, from a social governance perspective, current discussions of migrant worker issues often focus on the roles of government, enterprises, and social organizations in their employment and social security. However, the roles of various actors in the social governance of migrant workers' retirement are not clearly defined. For example, what responsibilities should

construction companies, as direct employers, assume in the retirement of migrant workers? These studies lack in-depth analysis from a social governance perspective. Overall, while current research has yielded some results and provided some understanding of migrant workers' employment and some social security issues, it lacks in-depth and comprehensive research on the retirement issues facing older migrant workers in the construction industry, as well as the conflict between existing social governance and their pressing needs.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the elderly care needs of elderly migrant workers and their current difficulties in providing for them, this paper takes Sichuan Province as an example and conducts a survey on the elderly care issues of elderly migrant workers in the construction industry under the social governance of the new era. Combining field visits and literature analysis, this paper aims to explore effective social work intervention strategies and put forward policy recommendations and practical guidelines.

At the same time, this study aims to provide a practical basis for optimizing labor policies in the construction industry, helping to resolve the dilemma of "aging before getting rich" and promoting the implementation of the goal of "urbanization of migrant workers" in the "14th Five-Year Plan". In addition, at the theoretical level, this article deepens the understanding of the dilemma of elderly migrant workers from a new perspective of social governance, expands the research framework of migrant workers in the construction industry under the background of aging, and by combining traditional elderly care research with the issues of migrant workers in the construction industry, we can better understand the special situations faced by migrant workers in their old age and provide new ideas and suggestions for the formulation of relevant policies.

## 2. Literature Review

With the acceleration of urbanization and the deepening aging of my country's population, the issue of elderly care for migrant workers has gradually become a focus of academic attention. Existing research has primarily focused on social

security, employment status, health status, and social integration among migrant workers. However, research on elderly care for this specific group of migrant workers in the construction industry is still in its early stages, and there is a lack of systematic research from the perspective of social governance in the new era.

## 2.1 Definition of Concepts

There has been no unified definition of elderly migrant workers in the academic community. The definition is mainly based on the classification of the age structure of migrant workers by the National Bureau of Statistics. In the migrant worker inspection survey report released by the National Bureau of Statistics, they are divided into five age groups. They are 16-20 years old, 21-30 years old, 31-40 years old, 41-50 years old, and over 50 years old. Lu Shuzhen divides over-age migrant workers by their identities. She points out that over-age migrant workers refer to the group of men over 60 years old and women over 55 years old who leave their registered residence to work in the city. This article defines elderly migrant workers as those over 60 years old. The future retirement location of this group is not used as the definition point of elderly migrant workers, but the current retirement status of this group is analyzed and governance countermeasures are proposed [2].

## 2.2 Literature Review

Research on the elderly care issues of migrant workers has found that whether they “return to their hometowns” or “stay in the city” is the result of the combined effects of “push” and “pull” factors. After entering the city through “family cooperation”, elderly migrant workers age before becoming rich. The lack of sufficient “capital to stay in the city” makes most of them choose to return to their hometowns to reduce the cost of retirement. However, their own functional decline and the dual system of social security also make the elderly migrant workers’ retirement dilemma urgently need to be solved [3].

The discussion on self-care for over-age migrant workers is generally based on the level of regional economic development. One type is mutual assistance, companionship and land-based care in underdeveloped areas; the other type is work-based care in developed areas. The problem is that some migrant workers in underdeveloped areas work in the provincial capitals where their household registration is located, while others flow into developed eastern areas. Their families and lives are deeply embedded in the urban system. Before the policy of clearing out migrant workers came into being, the vast majority of migrant workers in the construction industry continued to work on construction sites before entering retirement status. In a sense, they had the choice of whether to advance or retreat. After the policy of clearing out over-age migrant workers came into being, this group did not want to return to the countryside because they were “young”, and could not stay on the construction sites because they were “old”, which aroused social attention and discussion. The traditional family care function has been significantly weakened among the elderly migrant workers [5]. Xie Yating found through qualitative research in rural areas that due to the widespread phenomenon of children working away from

home and generational separation, elderly migrant workers face serious lack of emotional comfort and life care. Furthermore, while community elderly care service facilities have seen some improvements in hardware, there is still a significant gap between the service content and professional capabilities and the actual needs of elderly migrant workers.

In recent years, with the deepening of social governance concepts, scholars have begun to pay attention to the synergistic role of the government, enterprises, social organizations, etc. in pension security [7]. Li Yue’e proposed that a multi-governance mechanism of “government-led, enterprise-responsible, social participation, and family supplement” should be established. Especially in the construction industry, the employer responsibility of enterprises should be strengthened and the “construction site + community” linkage service model should be promoted. [8] In addition, the professional role of social work in resource connection, psychological support, policy publicity, etc. has also gradually been valued.

## 2.3 Literature Review

In summary, existing research reveals the complexity and urgency of the pension issue for elderly migrant workers from multiple perspectives, but there are also the following shortcomings: First, insufficient attention is paid to the particularities of the high-risk and high-mobility construction industry; second, there is a lack of systematic analysis of the responsibilities and collaboration paths of various subjects from the perspective of “co-construction, co-governance and sharing” social governance; third, research on soft dimensions such as the mental health and policy awareness of elderly migrant workers is relatively weak.

## 3. Existing Real Problems

Although domestic and foreign scholars have conducted some research on the elderly care issues of migrant workers and have achieved certain results in policy advocacy and social security, in actual research, we found that elderly migrant workers still face many practical difficulties in their elderly care. Based on the actual situation of the team’s offline visits to some areas in Sichuan and combined with the literature we have consulted, we concluded that the current practical problems of elderly migrant workers’ elderly care are mainly reflected in the following aspects:

First, economic security is fragile. Elderly migrant workers generally have low incomes and lack stable retirement savings. According to survey data, many elderly migrant workers earn less than 6,000 yuan per month, and over 60% do not contribute to urban employee pension insurance. Even for some who participate in rural resident pension insurance, their pension replacement rate (averaging 187 yuan per month) is insufficient to cover basic living needs. Furthermore, due to long-term, arduous labor, approximately 45% of elderly migrant workers suffer from occupational diseases, yet only 12% have access to work-related injury insurance. Medical expenses further squeeze already limited retirement savings. This economic instability creates significant pressure for elderly migrant workers in their retirement years.

Second, there is a lack of social security and inadequate policy implementation. Social security coverage for older migrant workers is low, and there are significant gaps in policy implementation. The construction industry, a primary employment sector for older migrant workers, exacerbates this lack of protection with its short-term employment and labor subcontracting system. A survey found that the social security compliance rate among construction companies was only 32%. Elderly migrant workers moving across provinces face difficulties in transferring and continuing their pension insurance, with the provincial interprovincial coverage rate below 30%. Although the government has introduced relevant policies, such as a pilot program for long-term care insurance and subsidies for elderly care services, many older migrant workers lack understanding of the policies due to inadequate publicity and weak implementation at the grassroots level. Consequently, the benefits of these policies have not fully benefited this group.

Third, weakening family support and intergenerational conflicts. The traditional family-based care model faces severe challenges for elderly migrant workers. Research shows that the intergenerational care dilemma facing these workers is acute, manifesting as a vicious cycle of “economic dislocation, family separation, and ethical conflict.” Due to limited income, unstable employment, and the squeeze of urban living costs, the actual care expenditure for second-generation migrant workers is less than 8% of their household income. The empty-nest rate is as high as 57%. The three-place separation structure of “older migrants to construction sites, children to cities, and grandchildren to rural areas” severely weakens the family’s ability to provide for their elderly. Furthermore, some elderly migrant workers still adhere to the traditional concept of “raising children to provide for old age,” but the realities of economic pressure and family separation make this difficult to achieve.

Fourth, there are deficiencies in the social support system. Elderly migrant workers face relatively fragile social support networks, and community-based elderly care services lack relevance and coverage. Research has revealed that while many community-based elderly care facilities have been established, the actual services offered are poorly aligned with the needs of elderly migrant workers. For example, community day care centers often serve as cultural and entertainment venues for healthy elderly people, while specialized care services for disabled or semi-disabled elderly migrant workers are severely lacking. Furthermore, elderly migrant workers have a low utilization rate of community services, partly due to insufficient publicity for these services and partly due to a failure to accurately address their actual needs, such as medical care and psychological support.

Fifth, mental health and spiritual comfort are neglected. The mental health of older migrant workers has long been neglected. Long-term, arduous labor, financial pressures, and family separation have led to widespread loneliness, anxiety, and other psychological issues among this group. However, psychological support services for older migrant workers are virtually nonexistent within the existing elderly care system. In surveys, many older migrant workers expressed a lack of attention to their spiritual needs, with community activities primarily focused on entertainment and a lack of professional

counseling and emotional support.

Sixth, industry-specific employment discrimination. Employment discrimination against older migrant workers is prominent in high-intensity industries like construction. Project cyclicity and age discrimination have led to a drop of over 60% in the recruitment rate for migrant workers aged 50 and over. Many older migrant workers are forced into informal employment due to age restrictions, facing a dilemma of low contract signing rates and low social security contribution rates. Furthermore, the risks of occupational diseases brought about by industry-specific occupational conditions further exacerbate their pension burden.

Seventh, policy awareness and participation are low. Elderly migrant workers generally have low levels of awareness and participation in pension policies. Our research found that many elderly migrant workers have little knowledge of the country’s pension security policies and even harbor misunderstandings. For example, some believe that paying into pension insurance will affect their children’s financial support, and therefore choose not to participate. This cognitive bias significantly reduces the effectiveness of the policy and reflects inadequate policy dissemination and grassroots services.

#### **4. Propose Countermeasures and Suggestions**

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, social work, as a crucial component of the elderly care service system, has received high attention from the Party and the State. In 2022, the State Council issued the “14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of National Aging Services and Elderly Care Service System,” which explicitly set the development goal of “maintaining at least one social worker for every thousand elderly people,” providing an opportunity for social work to be deeply and comprehensively integrated into elderly care services. The second section of the 2025 “Guiding Opinions on Establishing and Improving a Working Mechanism for Protecting the Legal Rights and Interests of the Elderly,” titled “Creating a Socially Supportive Environment,” explicitly states that social work service agencies should conduct publicity and education on elderly rights protection through public lectures and legal consultations. Section 10 of the “Opinions” proposes leveraging a diverse and multidisciplinary workforce, including social workers, to provide convenient and efficient legal services to the elderly. The initiative aims to integrate diverse resources to provide convenient, efficient, scientific, and professional services to meet the growing demand for elderly rights protection. Currently, social workers play a key role as resource connectors in elderly rights protection services. They effectively leverage various social welfare policies and service resources to meet the actual needs of the elderly, precisely connecting resources such as legal aid, medical assistance, and elderly care services to effectively address their practical challenges. In the future, services for elderly migrant workers in my country’s construction industry will be based on psychological support, social support, and policy support. In order to actively promote the high-quality development of China’s elderly care service system, we will adhere to demand orientation, mobilize broad social participation, and actively explore retirement solutions for

elderly migrant workers in the construction industry with Chinese characteristics.

#### 4.1 Improving Pension Security Standards

The improvement of pensions is not only related to the quality of life of the elderly, but also an important indicator of social progress. The central government has continued to exert its financial strength and is committed to improving the basic pension standards for urban and rural residents and narrowing the urban-rural gap. A basic pension calculation mechanism for urban and rural residents' basic pension insurance will be established based on factors such as economic and social development, the operation of urban and rural residents' basic pension insurance funds, the increase in consumer prices, and the increase in per capita disposable income of residents. The basic pension payment standards for urban and rural residents' basic pension insurance and the basic pension payment standards will be formulated [15]. The central document in 2025 clearly requires "gradually increasing the basic pension for urban and rural residents" and exploring the establishment of a rural personal account system to encourage farmers to accumulate pension funds through payment. For example, choosing a payment level with high government subsidies (such as Chongqing's 3,000 yuan level can receive an additional 150 yuan subsidy) can increase pension benefits and, to a certain extent, alleviate the social pension burden and promote the sustainable development of the pension security system.

#### 4.2 Deepen National Coordination and Transfer and Succession

Against the backdrop of the accelerated evolution of new urban areas and increasingly frequent population mobility, deepening the reform of the national coordination and transfer mechanism of pension insurance has become a key measure to improve the social security system and promote social equity. For some migrant workers with strong mobility and a large number of them, this measure is related to their pension security rights and interests. First, it promotes the national coordination of pension insurance, balances regional pension resources, and ensures that the pensions of migrant workers in economically underdeveloped areas are fully paid. At the same time, it simplifies the transfer and continuation procedures of pension insurance, establishes a national unified social security platform, and solves the problem of payment interruption caused by the mobility of migrant workers. China continues to improve the five-level social security management system and service network from the central government to provinces, cities, counties, and townships (streets), continuously improves the refinement and efficiency of social security transfer and continuation services, and pays close attention to the worries, concerns, and worries that the masses have strongly reflected in social security, which has greatly improved the sense of gain and happiness of migrant workers in enjoying social security benefits [15]. The second is to encourage construction companies to set up "policy liaison officers" and have social workers train class and team leaders to make them the "capillaries" of policy dissemination, and to jointly establish "returning home policy stations" with community committees to solve the confusion of migrant workers in promoting and answering questions

about the connection between urban and rural policies.

#### 4.3 Collaborative Elderly Care and Elderly Assistance

Promoting collaborative elderly care and support for the elderly requires transcending the limitations of traditional elderly care models and establishing a three-dimensional framework of government guidance, social collaboration, and family participation, providing a more caring, sustainable, and sustainable model of care for the elderly. First, we should hold "Multi-Generation Dialogue Forums," inviting families that have successfully achieved intergenerational support to share their experiences and gradually shift the traditional perception of a "single responsibility for support." We should establish "Hometown Elderly Care Service Stations" in areas where migrant workers are being sent out. Social workers will coordinate with village collectives to rebuild local support networks, filling the emotional void left by children's absence through initiatives like "Neighborhood Elderly Care Teams" and "Ancestral Hall Elderly Care Dining Tables." Second, we should accelerate the construction of rural mutual-help elderly care centers and provide basic services such as day care and meal delivery to elderly migrant workers in different circumstances. This will build a community support network that allows elderly care to be provided close to home, effectively alleviating the burden of elderly care in rural areas and establishing a three-dimensional support framework with government guidance and multi-stakeholder participation.

#### 4.4 Psychological Adjustment and Emotional Support

Establish dedicated mental health service centers for migrant workers to conduct regular mental health assessments, promptly identify psychological issues, and provide appropriate intervention measures. These centers should also offer services such as psychological counseling, psychological guidance, and the dissemination of mental health knowledge. These centers should be staffed with professional psychological counselors. Social workers, along with counselors, should regularly conduct mental health lectures and counseling sessions. They should also distribute brochures, hold mental health lectures, and utilize social media for outreach, focusing on educating migrant workers on the importance of mental health, identifying common psychological issues, and addressing them, thereby enhancing their mental health awareness. Social organizations, volunteers, and community residents should be encouraged to participate in mental health services for migrant workers, fostering a positive atmosphere of shared social concern and support for the mental health of migrant workers. Through organizing volunteer activities and community mental health awareness campaigns, social awareness of migrant workers' mental health issues should be heightened.

#### 4.5 Medical Insurance and Physical Examination Mechanism

In the construction sector, elderly migrant workers face increased health risks due to long-term, high-intensity physical labor and the decline in physical function associated with aging. Due to factors such as job mobility and financial constraints, they lack timely access to medical insurance and health checks. Regarding medical care, we are implementing



dynamic chronic disease management through a three-tiered medical network across counties, towns, and villages. By increasing reimbursement rates for the New Rural Cooperative Medical System and providing drug subsidies, we are effectively reducing out-of-pocket medical expenses. Simultaneously, we are establishing a regular health checkup system to ensure early screening and treatment of diseases.

## 5. Conclusion

The issue of elderly migrant workers in the construction industry is a complex social issue intertwined with an aging population, a dual urban-rural structure, and industrial transformation. Based on field research, this article reveals their current predicament from the perspectives of employment, social security, health, and social integration, and proposes systematic solutions from multiple perspectives, including policy, employment, and social participation. Going forward, we must further strengthen the collaborative efforts of government, businesses, society, and families, and build a multidimensional support system encompassing economic security, health services, and social integration. Only then can we truly ensure that elderly migrant workers have adequate care and a secure retirement, and promote social equity and harmonious development.

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