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The impact of Pickleball on enhancing community-based elderly care services in China

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Abstract

This study explores pickleball's potential value and insights in promoting community-based elderly care services in China. As China's population rapidly ages, community elderly care services face numerous challenges. Through literature review and case analysis, this paper delves into the characteristics of pickleball and its positive impacts on the physical and mental health of the elderly. The study finds that pickleball, due to its low intensity, high social interaction, and ease of learning, is particularly suitable for the elderly. Integrating pickleball into community elderly care services can enhance physical fitness, promote social interactions, and improve mental health among the elderly. The paper proposes strategies for promoting pickleball in communities, including facility planning, training system establishment, and event organization. Additionally, the study addresses potential challenges in promotion, such as cultural adaptation and safety, and offers corresponding solutions. This research provides new ideas for innovative community elderly care service models, significantly improving the quality of life for the elderly and promoting healthy aging.

Keywords: pickleball; community elderly care; health services

Introduction

With the aging population, innovative community elderly care service models have become urgent. As an emerging recreational sport, pickleball has shown significant benefits for the physical and mental health of the elderly in Western countries. This study explores the feasibility and potential value of integrating pickleball into community elderly care services in China.

Potential Applications of Pickleball in Community Elderly Care Services

1. Benefits to Physical Health

Pickleball offers multiple health benefits for the elderly, making it a highly potential sport in community elderly care services. As a low-impact aerobic exercise, pickleball effectively enhances cardiovascular function and physical endurance without imposing excessive stress on the joints. Studies show that elderly individuals regularly participating in pickleball experience significant improvements in balance, coordination, and reaction speed, which are crucial for fall prevention. According to the American College of Sports Medicine, engaging in pickleball 3-4 times a week for 30-60 minutes each session can significantly reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases and type 2 diabetes in the elderly. Additionally, pickleball promotes bone density, preventing osteoporosis, which is particularly important for elderly women. In China, with the intensifying population aging, chronic disease prevention and control have become a focus of community health services. Pickleball provides a low-cost, high-efficiency solution to this issue. Promoting pickleball in communities can help the elderly establish regular exercise habits, improve overall physical function, and reduce the burden on medical resources.

2. Promoting Social Interaction and Mental Health

Pickleball has unique advantages in enhancing social interaction and mental health, making it an effective tool for addressing loneliness and depression among the elderly. The highly social sport offers numerous opportunities for interaction during doubles matches and off the court.

Research by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences indicates that elderly individuals participating in group sports activities are more likely to establish stable social networks and reduce feelings of loneliness than those exercising alone. Furthermore, pickleball's competitive and enjoyable nature stimulates the brain to release endorphins, elevating mood and alleviating anxiety and depression symptoms. A longitudinal study by Peking University found that elderly individuals who regularly participate in team sports like pickleball have a 30% lower incidence of depression compared to non-active counterparts.

Additionally, mastering a new skill through pickleball can significantly boost self-efficacy and confidence, especially for those who previously engaged in little physical activity. In traditional Chinese elderly care models, the psychological health of the elderly is often overlooked. Pickleball provides a new method for community elderly care services to address physical and mental health, contributing to a more comprehensive elderly care system.

3. Enhancing Community Engagement

The impact of pickleball on enhancing community engagement is significant, providing new avenues for building an active and harmonious community culture. Due to its ease of learning and play, pickleball can attract residents of different ages and athletic abilities, promoting intergenerational interaction. In some American communities, pickleball has become a link connecting the elderly with younger families, forming cross-age social circles. Additionally, organizing pickleball competitions and activities offers a new platform for community volunteer services, encouraging more residents to participate in community affairs. For instance, retired individuals can serve as coaches or referees, thus feeling a sense of community and belonging while remaining active.

Furthermore, the construction and maintenance of pickleball facilities can become a community-participated project, enhancing neighborhood spirit. Improving resident engagement in China has become vital in transforming community governance models. Pickleball offers an excellent entry point for this purpose. Setting up pickleball courts in community centers, parks, and other public spaces and organizing regular competitions and training activities can increase outdoor activity time for residents, promoting community interaction. This model not only improves the quality of life for the elderly but also lays a foundation for a more cohesive community culture.

Strategies for Integrating Pickleball into Community Elderly Care Services in China

1. Planning and Construction of Community Pickleball Facilities

The planning and construction of community pickleball facilities are fundamental to promoting this sport. Given the tight land resources in Chinese cities, a "multipurpose" strategy can be adopted, combining pickleball courts with existing community activity spaces. For example, suitable spaces can be designated at the edges of community parks, squares, or school playgrounds, with removable pickleball nets and court markings. A standard pickleball court only requires 20 feet by 44 feet, equivalent to a quarter of a badminton court, making it suitable for limited spaces. Community activity centers or unused industrial warehouses

can be converted into all-weather pickleball courts. Facility construction should also consider the unique needs of the elderly, such as non-slip flooring, adequate lighting systems, and rest areas. Drawing from Shenzhen's "15-minute fitness circle" concept, each community should ideally have at least one pickleball facility within proximity for elderly residents. Funding can be sourced through a government-led, community-participation model, encouraging businesses to contribute through sponsorships and considering "lease-to-build" models to attract professional sports facility operators, enhancing facility usage efficiency and management.

2. Establishing a Pickleball Training System for the Elderly

Establishing a training system for elderly pickleball is crucial for the healthy development of the sport within communities. Inspired by the promotion of Tai Chi, communities can train "pickleball health instructors," comprising enthusiastic elderly pickleball fans responsible for essential guidance and organizing activities. Modern technology can be leveraged to increase training coverage to develop online learning platforms and mobile apps, offering video tutorials and online consultation services. Additionally, a skill level evaluation system can be established, providing clear learning goals and a sense of achievement for the elderly, such as creating a "Silver Pickleball Ranking" to encourage continuous participation and improvement.

3. Organizing and promoting community pickleball activities

Organizing and promoting community pickleball activities are vital to maintaining enthusiasm for elderly participation. Community pickleball clubs can be established, led by the community committee, and managed by enthusiastic residents to organize regular events and competitions. Diverse activities, such as "Neighborhood Pickleball Leagues," "Family Pickleball Days," and "Pickleball Health Carnivals," can increase fun and participation. Particular attention should be given to intergenerational interaction, such as organizing "Grandparent-Grandchild Pair Tournaments" to promote family harmony. Promotion can utilize existing community channels like bulletin boards, WeChat groups, and community newspapers to publish pickleball information on activity information regularly. Local media can be invited to report on community pickleball activities to expand influence. Additionally, joint efforts with neighboring communities to organize inter-community pickleball-friendly matches can foster community exchange. To attract more elderly participants, a "Pickleball Health Points Card" can be introduced, allowing participants to accumulate points for activities that can be redeemed for health check-ups or healthcare products.

4. Integration of Pickleball with Existing Elderly Health Services

Pickleball can be integrated into community health service centers' chronic disease management plans. For instance, for chronic disease patients such as those with hypertension or diabetes, doctors can issue "exercise prescriptions" recommending pickleball as a form of exercise. Additionally, pickleball sessions can be scheduled at community daycare centers to provide more exercise opportunities for the elderly with mobility issues. Collaboration with community

rehabilitation centers can incorporate pickleball into rehabilitation training, especially for stroke patients, as it is an effective balance and coordination exercise. In terms of mental health, pickleball activities can be combined with community psychological counseling services, such as organizing "Sunshine Pickleball" groups to help the elderly with depression rebuild social networks.

Challenges and Solutions in Promoting Pickleball

1. Cultural Adaptation

As a new sport originating from the West, pickleball may encounter resistance due to traditional beliefs. Many Chinese older adults are accustomed to traditional activities like Tai Chi and square dancing and may feel unfamiliar with and resistant to pickleball. Additionally, the English name and rules of pickleball might pose language barriers. To address these issues:

- A more culturally resonant name, such as "Zhile Ball" or "Vitality Ball," can be created to increase affinity.
- Combining pickleball with traditional exercises, such as designing "Tai Chi Pickleball" incorporating Tai Chi elements, can make it more acceptable.
- Retired sports celebrities or respected community elders can be invited as pickleball ambassadors to leverage their influence for greater acceptance.
- Rules can be explained using straightforward Chinese expressions, avoiding technical jargon, and illustrated promotional materials can be used for clarity.
- Organizing "Pickleball Culture Festivals" and inviting enthusiasts from countries where pickleball is popular to exchange experiences can enhance cultural understanding and show how pickleball can blend with Chinese traditions, such as incorporating traditional Chinese etiquette into the game.

2. Safety Concerns

Despite its low-impact nature, the diverse physical conditions of the elderly mean there are still risks of sports injuries. Many elderly in China may not understand their exercise limits due to a lack of systematic guidance. Safety considerations also include the quality of facilities and equipment.

To tackle these challenges

- A health assessment system for elderly pickleball participants can be established, offering free health checks in cooperation with community health service centers and providing personalized exercise recommendations based on the results.
- Guidelines for pickleball tailored to different age groups and physical conditions, including recommended intensity, frequency, and exercise duration, can be developed.
- Coaches and volunteers can be given first aid training to handle emergencies promptly.
- Non-slip materials can be used for court surfaces, with adequate buffer zones around courts and sufficient lighting to prevent accidents due to poor vision.
- Special lightweight pickleball paddles and slower balls can be developed for the elderly to reduce injury risks.

3. Resource Allocation and Policy Support

Community sports resources in China need to be improved to

secure resources for pickleball within the existing framework. Additionally, more specific policy support could be needed to impact the extent and effectiveness of promotion. To address these issues:

- A "multi-functional" approach can be adopted in resource allocation, such as designing convertible multipurpose courts that can be quickly adapted for pickleball when needed, enhancing space utilization and gaining community support.
- Advocating for the formulation of "Community Pickleball Development Guidelines" can provide policy support for nationwide promotion.
- Establishing a national pickleball association to coordinate development, set standards, organize events, and facilitate international exchanges can create a favorable policy environment and resource support for the long-term development of pickleball.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the characteristics of pickleball, its health impacts on the elderly, and the opportunities and challenges of promoting it in China. The study focuses on the effects of pickleball on elderly physical health, mental health, and community participation and proposes specific promotion strategies and implementation suggestions. This research offers new ideas for community managers to address the challenges of an aging population, promote healthy living and social participation among the elderly, and ultimately help build a more comprehensive community elderly care system.

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