



Participation to Bridge the Distance: Governance in Maternal and Child Health Care in Rural China

Introduction

Great achievements have been made in the improvement of maternal and child health care (MCH) outcome in the early period of the People's Republic of China. However such improvement was largely halted during the reforming era after the late 1970s, in particular in rural areas. In examining the reasons for this, attention has increasingly been turned to the role of public finance.



However, while an increase in the level of public funding for MCH is obviously necessary, if China's MCH outcomes are going to see significant improvements, it will not be sufficient. In fact, governance within the MCH system also has important implications for the development of MCH in rural China. Therefore, it is necessary to go beyond a single-minded focus on public finance for the MCH sector, and to examine important governance issues which can matter critically to how the increased public funding can in fact be used.

Aim

This research aims to explore the role which community participation can play in contributing to enhancing governance in MCH, and ultimately to the improvements in MCH outcomes in rural China.

Objective

- To review and assess the performance of MCH in the past and at present in rural China, and the major challenges for them;
- To explore the impact of state-society relations on governance performance of MCH in rural China;
- To investigate the contribution of community participation to surmounting the distance between the state and society in rural China.

Research Questions

- What have the main achievements and challenges of MCH governance in rural China been in the past three decades?
- Does the state-society relationship in rural China have an impact on MCH governance performance and MCH outcome, and what is this impact?

- Could community participation be a way to tackle major challenges in MCH governance related to the state-society relationship in rural China?
- By which pathways can community participation contribute to better performance of the MCH system, and eventually to an improvement of MCH outcomes in rural China?
- What are potential influencing factors that might contribute to successful applications of the community participatory model in MCH governance in rural China?

Theory

- Theory of state-society relations:
 - ※ Fragmented structure of authority;
 - ※ Social cellularization;
 - ※ Distance between the state and society
- Theory of community participation

Methodology

- Case Study:
 - Two counties in the least developed area of China: Heqing and Jianchuan.
- Comparative Study:
 - Two models: the participatory model and the state regulated model.

Findings

- There exist "systematic fragmentations" between the government, the provider and the user in China's MCH system in rural areas;
- "Systematic fragmentation" in MCH governance is largely a result of the Chinese state-society relationship;
- Existing "systematic fragmentation" is found to be a key factor determining the effect of rural MCH governance through three pathways;
- Community participation could be a way to overcome the distance between the state and society, and to solve the problem of "systematic fragmentation" in MCH governance;
- Successful application of the participatory model in MCH in rural China depends on a range of social, political and cultural factors.



The Researcher

Contact Information:
qu.wang@univie.ac.at

Jenny Qu Wang, Research Fellow and PhD Candidate at ViGo, received her MA in Sociology in China, and studied at the Hopkins-Nanjing Center in inter-disciplinary studies. She has been a research fellow at CHEDS, Peking University, and has been actively involved in a range of research projects on health policy in China.