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Needs for Accessing and Using Social Work Services in Mental Health Care of Older Adults

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Abstract Older adults are facing health challenges, especially mental health. The increased need for care leads to the expansion of formal care services and increases costs. The need for caregivers for the older adults is increasing. Concentrated care services often include 24-hour supervision, support for daily living activities, nursing, rehabilitation, adaptation support, psychology, therapy, social activities, etc. Concentrated care services are available at hospitals, nursing homes or social protection facilities/centers certified/licensed by the state. Therefore, the study of the current demand for social work services in mental health care for the older adults is a topic that needs to be researched and implemented through research questions such as: (i) What are the current needs of the older adults for social work services to care for their mental health? (ii) Do these services adequately meet the current mental health care needs of the older adults?...

Keywords Mental health care, Need, Older adults, Social work, Social work Services

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1. Introduction

More than 20% of people aged 60 and over have a mental or neurological disorder (excluding headaches). The most common mental and neurological disorders in this age group are dementia and depression ([HelpAge International Vietnam, 2021](#)). Changing lifestyle trends, smaller families and greater participation of women in the labour market reduce the ability to provide informal care (by relatives such as spouses, children, grandchildren, etc.). Target 3.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): “by 2030, reduce by one-third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention, treatment and mental health promotion” ([United Nations Vietnam, 2019](#)).

Older adults care activities are effectively implemented to meet the needs of the older adults for health and mental care, such as combining health care with other recreational activities through singing clubs, poetry clubs, and health exercises. Older adults care activities are effectively implemented to meet the needs of the older adults for health and mental care, such as combining health care with other recreational activities through singing clubs, poetry clubs, and health exercises.

However, it is still unclear how the need for social work services in mental health care for the older adults, especially the older adults in concentrated care facilities, is. Although this issue is identified as an important factor, a premise for building a health care ecosystem in general and mental health care for the older adults. Therefore, the level of necessity to deploy social work services for mental health care for the older adults in concentrated care facilities to be appropriate and maximize effectiveness, meeting the needs of the older adults. All of these have created difficulties and challenges in caring for the older adults through social work activities.

2. Research methods

In this article, the author relies on the PRISMA method to carry out his document research process. Accordingly, the research process begins with searching for documents related to social work services for mental health care, the need for social work services for mental health care of the older adults, etc. Then, the author screens and analyzes the content of the searched documents according to the correct topic and target content.

2.1 Document selection criteria

The keywords used by the author include: “Need”, “Mental health care”, “Older adults”, “Social work”, “Social work Services”. The documents were searched on reputable sources such as Google Scholar, PubMed, Scopus and Web of Science. The searched documents are guaranteed to be updated and latest in the last 5 years.

Document search period: until December 2024.

2.2 Search process

Table 1: Description of data search and data research process

IDENTIFICATION	Identify search keywords	• “Mental health care” • “Need” • “Older adults” • “Social work” • “Social work Services”
	Round 1 data collection (n=225)	• 225 academic studies/analytical articles were found on online data sources, specifically: • Google Scholar: n=51. Scopus: n=56 • PubMed: n= 68. Web of Science: n= 50
	Round 2 data collection (n=163)	• Filtered to remove 62 articles/studies due to inappropriateness in the field of mental health of the older adults • 163 articles/studies left
	Round 3 data collection (n= 77)	• Filtered out 86 articles/studies due to inappropriateness regarding the “older adults” audience

		• 77 articles/studies left
ANALYSIS	Data Analysis	• Data were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative content analysis methods. • Quantitative analysis focuses on determining the frequency of occurrence of keywords and topics in documents. • Qualitative analysis focuses on understanding the meanings and perspectives presented in documents.

3. Research results

3.1 Theoretical concepts

Concept of older adults

There are many different views about the age of the older adults, within in this study, researchers use the concept of older adults in The law of The older adults of Vietnam are people aged 60 years or older up ([National Assembly, 2009](#)).

Concept of mental health care for the older adults

Mental health care for the older adults is the implementation of a type of care service health and service delivery are provided by a number of fields related to psychological assessment and intervention. This type of care includes but is not limited to psychological screening and testing, psychotherapy and family therapy, and neuropsychological rehabilitation, also known as behavioral health care. Mental health services are any intervention such as assessment, diagnosis, treatment or counseling provided in private, public, inpatient or outpatient settings to maintain or promote mental health or treat mental or behavioral disorders in the older adults. Mental health care for the older adults through the implementation of services helps the older adults gain confidence in their own value, in the qualities and values of others, thereby creating, maintaining and developing satisfactory development of relationships. Older adults feel refreshed, in a sense of comfort, joy, and serenity; in optimistic thoughts, love of life; in positive, courageous, and proactive concepts of life; in the ability to resist pessimistic beliefs and unhealthy lifestyles.

We can understand mental health care for the older adults as the implementation of comprehensive services from prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation,...for the older adults to have the best mental health state so they can participate in work and rest, make friends, love and have personal orientation (values, control, realistic beliefs, emotions and coping, problem solving and control, realistic beliefs, emotions and coping, problem solving and creativity, humor, diet, exercise, self-care, ability to manage stress, gender identity, cultural identity), how to handle life situations.

Concept of mental health care needs of older adults

There is no separate concept of “mental health care needs of the older adults”. The author proposes the concept of “mental health care needs of the older adults”, as follows:

The needs of mental health care for the older adults are the demands and desires that need to be satisfied regarding mental health care for the older adults. These demands are expressed in the intentions, wishes, and orientations of the older adults towards the prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of mental health. Thereby helping the older adults to fully and completely perform their life functions, to integrate into life, achieve comprehensive security (well-being) and basic quality of life.

Concept of social work, social work services

In July 2014, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) General Meeting and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) General Assembly agreed globally on the definition of the social work profession: *Social work is a science and practice that promotes empowerment, freedom, social cohesion, social change and development. The core principles of social work are respect for diversity, collective responsibility, human rights and*

social justice. Based on social work theory, social sciences, indigenous knowledge and humanities, social work connects people and organizations to address life challenges and improve the quality of life.

IFSW ([International Federation of Social Workers, 2014](#)): "Social work services aim to enhance the social functioning and well-being of individuals through professional interventions."

3.2 Studies on the need for access to and use of social work services in mental health care

There are many studies on the urgent and relatively diverse mental health care needs of the older adults such as: the need for education and information provision ([Mackenzie & Pankratz, 2022](#); [Villafuerte, 2023](#)) ; the need for examination and screening ([Bodeker, 2022](#); [Kalašić & Pfeiffer, 2017](#); [Pandey et al., 2022](#)) ; the need for treatment and treatment support ([Chen Honglin et al., 2023](#); [Lavretsky & Pot, 2024](#); [Meynet et al., 2022](#); [Sivakumar et al., 2024](#)) ; rehabilitation needs ([Artama et al., 2022](#); [Carlos Augustos De Mendonça Lima & Nicolas Kühne, 2019](#); [Gimigliano et al., 2018](#); [Mlinac et al., 2017](#); [Passos et al., 2012](#); [Siddiqi et al., 2024](#); [Stefan et al., 2022](#)) ; the need to develop comprehensive mental health care based on social interaction ([Alfina Pramelia Wulandari & Noorrizki, 2023](#); [Chen Honglin et al., 2023](#); [Dijin Li, 2023a](#); [Elnara et al., 2023](#)). In particular, studies show that the mental health care needs of the older adults vary among different groups of older adults. However, research on the need to access and use social work services in mental health care for the older adults is still very limited.

The need for access to and use of social work services for mental health care of older adults is increasingly important due to the increase in mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety among older adults. Access to and use of mental health social work services is a very important need for older adults, as they face significant mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety and social isolation, which affect more than 20% of older adults globally ([Lee et al., 2020](#)) . Integrating social work services within a public health framework is important for promoting mental health, as it enables a multidisciplinary approach that includes health, social care and community engagement ([Sivakumar et al., 2024](#); [Zeng Yueyang, 2023](#)) . Therefore, meeting the need for access to and use of social work services and increasing access to and use of these services is crucial to addressing the unique challenges faced by an aging population.

Social work services play a key role in addressing the mental health needs of older adults by fostering trusting relationships, reshaping care narratives, and building support networks to enhance community engagement ([Wilberforce et al., 2022](#)) . However, many older adults remain underserved by mental health social work services, often due to personal beliefs about self-management and barriers related to education and functional decline ([Volkert et al., 2018](#)) . Therefore, targeted interventions are needed to improve access to and engagement in mental health services for this population ([Jemma, 2024](#)) .

Specialized support social workers can effectively engage older adults by building trust and reshaping care narratives, which are essential to addressing their cognitive and emotional mental health care access needs ([Wilberforce et al., 2022](#)). Enhancing the well-being of older adults requires increased access to social work services tailored to their mental health needs.

The need for access to and use of social work services in the mental health care of older adults includes the need for mental health knowledge and the need for intervention, using social work services for mental health care. The need for appropriate recognition and intervention is emphasized, as many older adults associate symptoms of mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, with aging rather than seeking appropriate care ([Lee et al., 2020](#)) . Collaborative efforts between multidisciplinary teams to enhance service delivery and address these barriers, ultimately improving the quality of life for older adults facing mental health challenges ([Gabriela Kelemen, et al., 2019](#); [Mackenzie & Pankratz, 2022](#)) .

Barriers to accessing mental health social work services include self-stigma, misconceptions about aging, and lack of understanding of mental health ([Mackenzie & Pankratz, 2022](#)) . Older adults face many barriers to accessing and using social work services for mental health care, which significantly impact their help-seeking behavior. Key barriers include stigma and negative attitudes toward mental health treatment, often leading to the belief that they should not need help ([Elshaikh et al., 2023](#)) . Financial constraints, lack of transportation, and limited knowledge of available services further impede the need to access social work services for mental health care ([Lavingia et al., 2020](#)) . Research indicates that older adults are less likely to use mental health services, with only 7% of those with a mental disorder seeking help in the past year, largely due to personal beliefs and stigma surrounding treatment ([Volkert et al., 2018](#)) . In addition, older adults express challenges in accessing information about available services,

which may impede their autonomy and quality of life (Tiilikainen et al., 2019). In addition, older adults with comorbidities, older adults in minority populations, increased stigma, and language barriers may face challenges, exacerbating difficulties in accessing social work services in their mental health care (Lavingia et al., 2020). Addressing these barriers through targeted interventions and community outreach is essential to improve access to mental health social work services for older adults (Berry et al., 2020).

In particular, the mental health care needs of different groups of older adults are also different. Special groups, such as older adults living alone, mainly want support to deal with loneliness, older adults with physical disabilities want to be respected by society, and those with mental disabilities seek social acceptance (Chen Honglin et al., 2023). The use of health care, social services, and entertainment services in rural China is significantly higher than that in urban China (Yang et al., 2021). In addition, older adults women often have a poorer quality of life than men, although there is no significant difference in the use of health care services (Pham Thang et al., 2018). On the other hand, older adults in Central Vietnam tend to use health care services more than those in Northern Vietnam, indicating differences in living conditions and social support (Nguyen Tuyet Anh & Giang Thanh Long, 2020). Therefore, there are still many issues to be addressed in accessing mental health care services for different groups of older adults in society.

In general, studies in the world and in Vietnam have shown that the current mental health care needs of the older adults are quite diverse, such as: the need for education and information provision; the need for mental health examination and screening; the need for treatment and support for mental health problems; the need for mental health rehabilitation. It is noteworthy that there are differences in mental health care needs among different groups of older adults. However, studies focusing on the mental health care needs of the older adults, studies on the need to access and use social work services in mental health care for the older adults are limited. Moreover, most of the studies are conducted on groups of older adults in the community. Meanwhile, the older adults living in concentrated care facilities also have their own characteristics, with their own needs to access and use social work services for mental health care. Therefore, it is not clear how the need to access and use social work services in mental health care for the older adults in concentrated care facilities is, what are the characteristics or differences compared to the older adults living in the community. Moreover, studies in the world and in Vietnam mainly clarify the needs of mental health care for the older adults from the perspective of the medical or psychological sector, lacking the perspective of the social work sector. Therefore, this is a gap that needs to be researched and clarified, and this topic will strive to clarify the need to access and use social work services in mental health care for the older adults living in concentrated care facilities.

3.3 Social work services for mental health care of the older adults

In many countries, social work in mental health care has developed for more than a century, focusing on comprehensive support for older adults with diverse intervention models (Dang Kim Khanh Ly & Bui Thanh Minh, 2024). Social work plays an important role in influencing mental health outcomes of older people by addressing different aspects of health, helping to build community participation, enhancing social cohesion, thereby improving mental health and providing support (Dell et al., 2020; Diyali, 2021; NassrinDafaalla El Hag Yousif, et al., 2023; Y. Wang et al., 2023; Wenyi, 2021; Westhuizen, 2023). Case management approaches can improve the efficiency and accessibility of services, and older adults' participation in program development will promote social cohesion and support (Ho Margaret Kay et al., 2022). These activities aim to enhance the well-being of older adults through collaborative efforts between health care professionals and social workers in social care, addressing both physical and mental health needs.

Social workers are professionals with deep understanding, knowledge and skills to understand the stages of human life throughout the lifespan. Therefore, with multidisciplinary and multidimensional strategies, social workers focus on preventive, promotional and protective treatments for the overall and comprehensive life journey during the golden period of life (Diyali, 2021). Social workers intervene by focusing on optimizing the quality of life of older adults, based on the methods, techniques and tools of the profession such as the Barthel index, the Lawton and Brody scale and the mini-intelligence test (Gema Beatriz Intriago-Molina & Ligia Estela Llor-Lino, 2021). Effective collaboration between health and social care professionals is essential to address geriatric care challenges, improve access, and enhance overall health outcomes (Vo Man Thi Hue et al., 2024). Integration of physical and behavioral health care is even more necessary today to promote health in older adults with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder (Dell et al., 2020).

In addition, social workers carry out online interventions and provide psychological and social care services; there are changes in policies and strategic partnerships of older adults support centers, introducing new high-tech tools to carry out online social work interventions; participating in the implementation and monitoring of new initiatives of the online club model- Assala, receiving, responding to requests, monitoring benefits, home nursing and providing social and psychological care services (NassrinDafaalla El Hag Yousif, et al., 2023) .

Social workers play a vital role in addressing the unmet mental health needs of older adults through various interventions and support mechanisms. They are integral members of multidisciplinary teams, particularly in community mental health settings, where social workers' work skills enhance team dynamics and improve service delivery for older adults with mental health problems (Abendstern et al., 2016) . Social workers are involved in case management, direct support, and community engagement, which are essential to individualize care and address the complex needs of this demographic (Elices Acero et al., 2024) . Furthermore, social workers facilitate access to resources and advocate for the rights of older adults, thus addressing systemic barriers that contribute to their vulnerability (Rebeca Adámez& Andrés Correa, 2016). Despite the growing demand for social work services for mental health care among older adults, the profession still faces challenges such as inadequate training and high workloads, which hinder effective service delivery (Judith Anderson, et al., 2022) . Therefore, enhancing the capacity and specialization of social workers is crucial to improving mental health outcomes among older adults.

In Vietnam, hospital social work has developed strongly over the past 10 years, with supporting and cooperating functions to improve the quality of medical services with the need to improve human resources (Dang Kim Khanh Ly & Bui Thanh Minh, 2024; Nguyen Thi Hoai An, 2024) . Social workers not only help patients but also generate financial resources for hospitals (Dang Kim Khanh Ly & Bui Thanh Minh, 2024) . Despite progress, challenges remain in implementing social work activities due to the lack of detailed guidelines and training (Nguyen Thi Thai Lan et al., 2024) . While there is growing recognition of the importance of social work in mental health care for older adults, both globally and in Vietnam, ongoing challenges in implementation and collaboration need to be addressed to optimize care such as lack of resources and coordination between services (Nguyen Thi Thai Lan et al., 2024) .

Globally, the integration of social work into residential care settings such as mental health care facilities is considered a valuable resource to alleviate work overload, support unmet needs, and improve the effectiveness of treatment groups such as the older adults with mental health problems (Chau Leena W. et al., 2021) . Older adults centers coordinate with relevant organizations, conduct research, write reports, and use WhatsApp groups, telephones, Zoom, and other smart devices to provide mental health care services to the older adults (NassrinDafaalla El Hag Yousif, et al., 2023)

Older adults care facilities in Hanoi, Vietnam provide social support services, with the highest demand for medical care while emotional support is also important (Nguyen Thi Lien et al., 2022) . Older adults' satisfaction with social work services at these centers is at a medium to high level (Nguyen Thi Lien et al., 2022) . However, these social work services have only been mentioned in terms of general health care, and mental health care services for the older adults have not been studied in depth. Consequently, research on social work services addressing the mental health care needs of older adults in residential care facilities is lacking and has not received sufficient attention in both research and practice.

Challenges in meeting the needs of accessing and using social work services for mental health care of the older adults

Meeting the needs of older adults for access to and use of mental health services faces significant challenges. These challenges include limited awareness, stigma, limited facilities, and lack of trained professionals that hinder older adults from accessing the care they need in mental health care.

Limited awareness significantly challenges access and utilization of mental health services among older adults, primarily due to low mental health literacy and stigmatizing attitudes. Many older adults struggle to recognize mental illness, often viewing symptoms as normal aging, which reduces their likelihood of seeking help (Malkin et al., 2019) . In addition, the lack of recognition and understanding of mental health needs, particularly among minority populations, highlights the need for targeted educational programs to increase awareness and encourage treatment-seeking behaviors (Berry et al., 2020; Malkin et al., 2019) . Overall, addressing these awareness-related challenges is critical to increasing access to mental health care for older adults.

Older adults, especially those from minority groups such as the transgender community, face psychosocial issues such as trauma and stigma when seeking mental health services (Nguyen Hang Nguyet Van et al., 2021; Thakkar et al., 2024). Studies show that stigma associated with aging and mental health issues such as dementia is on the rise, leading to discrimination and lack of information in the community (Nguyen Thu Trang, 2023; Stanojević Jerković et al., 2023). Older adults face barriers such as social discrimination and inadequate health insurance coverage, which exacerbate their mental health issues (Thakkar et al., 2024). In addition, older adults are often portrayed with negative characteristics, causing anxiety about aging (Nguyen Thu Trang, 2024). Stigma related to mental health prevents many from seeking help (Andary et al., 2023). Stigma surrounding mental health further exacerbates negative attitudes towards treatment, leading to poor utilization of available services (Hay & Schroder, 2023; Lavingia et al., 2020). As a result, older adults, especially those in the LGBTQ+ community, often face stigma when seeking mental health care, are stigmatized or self-stigmatized (Stanojević Jerković et al., 2023; Thakkar et al., 2024), and tend to withdraw from social life, refuse help, and use the social health services needed for them (Levkoff, S., Levy, B., & Weitzman, PF, 1999; Thanh Hang, 2022; General Statistics Office & UNFPA, 2021; Xiao, LD et al., 2015).

In addition, the challenge of a lack of facilities for mental health care services and activities also significantly affects the ability to access and use mental health care services for the older adults. The system of facilities for health care and mental health care in some countries such as Vietnam is struggling to provide adequate services for the older adults, leading to a decline in physical and mental health (Vo Man Thi Hue et al., 2024). Older adults often lack access to mental health care services partly due to lack of appropriate facilities and infrastructure (Kosowicz et al., 2023; Lavingia et al., 2020; Zinzi Pardoel et al., 2023), challenges such as gaps in older adults health care infrastructure, limited access to specialized care, and inadequate social security measures for older adults persist, especially in countries like India (Gandarillas & Goswami, 2018). Current health care trends involve a variety of practices and pilot projects that are uncoordinated, fragmented, and scattered (Gandarillas & Goswami, 2018), community support programs such as Intergenerational Self-Help Clubs (ISHCs) in Vietnam have shown effectiveness but still need to be expanded (Zinzi Pardoel et al., 2023). In Vietnam, although there are some health care services, specialized services for the older adults with dementia, cognitive impairment and other mental problems are still limited (Kosowicz et al., 2023; Le Hong Huynh Truong et al., 2023). Moreover, mental health care services for the older adults are mainly concentrated in large cities (Kosowicz et al., 2023), and the older adults in rural areas have limited access to services and health professionals (Nguyen Hang Nguyet Van et al., 2021). Therefore, the facilities are not sufficient to serve the needs of the older adults in mental health care, and more measures are needed to build a comprehensive mental health service system for the older adults, in order to improve the quality of life for this population group (Dijin Li, 2023b).

Access to and use of mental health care services for the older adults also faces challenges in terms of human resources when the mental health care team for the older adults does not meet the requirements in terms of professional training. Human resource challenges also hinder mental health care activities for the older adults because community health care staff are not trained and provided with enough resources to care for mental health problems in the older adults such as dementia, affecting the quality of support for older adults patients (Le Hong Huynh Truong et al., 2023). Many countries are facing a shortage of human resources in the field of mental health care for the older adults, leading to insufficient support services (Nguyen Hang Nguyet Van et al., 2021; Thakkar et al., 2024). Shortages of mental health care workers also reduce the quality of services (Kosowicz et al., 2023) or prevent many older adults from accessing mental health care services (Zinzi Pardoel et al., 2023). In Vietnam, the quality of care for older adults with dementia and other mental health problems is limited due to a lack of qualified staff (Le Hong Huynh Truong et al., 2023). Research shows that many mental health care workers such as medical staff are not confident in diagnosing and treating mental health problems due to lack of knowledge and experience in the field (Le Hong Huynh Truong et al., 2023).

Development trends of social work services in mental health care for the older adults

Current trends in geriatric health services for older adults include a shift towards innovative approaches to address the challenges posed by an aging population. Many countries are developing community mental health service systems to support older adults (Dijin Li, 2023b). Combining policy and research can promote the development of more effective mental health services (Murphy et al., 2024). Technological advances, particularly in the field of the Internet of Things (IoT), have enabled the development of smart devices for remote health monitoring and independent living, providing cost-effective solutions for geriatric care (Sahu et al., 2021). In addition, an integrated healthcare management system combining predictive and personalized healthcare, home care, and community

health networks is proposed to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of healthcare services for the older adults with chronic diseases (Yalong Wei, 2023) . Efforts to dynamically measure multidimensional needs of the older adults, personalized care models, and integration of new technologies are proposed as future directions to further enhance healthcare services for the older adults (Felix, 2017) .

The Internet of Things (IoT) technology has benefited the healthcare industry. It not only allows monitoring of health parameters of geriatric patients from a remote location but also allows them to live an independent life in a cost-effective manner. It is the foundation for developing future solutions and providing efficient, cost-effective healthcare services to those in need (Sahu et al., 2021) .

In addition, an integrated health care management system combining predictive and personalized health care, home care, and community health network is proposed to improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of health care services for the older adults with chronic diseases (Yalong Wei, 2023) . The studies have proposed three future research directions, including multidimensional dynamic measurement of the needs of the older adults, the interaction between the behavioral characteristics of the older adults and the services for them, and an integrated pension model combining the real context and new technology, including multidimensional dynamic measurement of the needs of the older adults, the interaction between the behavioral characteristics of the older adults and the services for them (X. Wang et al., 2023; Yalong Wei, 2023) . In addition to medical interventions, there are promising interventions such as Lishi, a traditional form of East Asian movement exercise, which has shown positive results in improving physical and mental health in older Vietnamese adults (Huang et al., 2023) . Vietnam is undergoing reforms to shift towards community-based mental health services, moving away from its previous institutionalized approach (Huang et al., 2023; Minas et al., 2017) . Incorporating culturally appropriate practices and interventions, such as those provided through Buddhist temples, could further enhance mental health support for older adults in Vietnam (Nguyen Ngoc Huong, 2016) . In the biomedical mental health system and formal mental health services provided through Buddhist temples, mindfulness is a growing trend and an effective source of support for older Vietnamese adults with mental health problems. By integrating physical health care with behavioral care, social workers can effectively support older adults with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder, thereby improving their mental health outcomes (Dell et al., 2020) . A promising approach involves the use of indigenous culturally based interventions to promote mental and physical health, reducing disparities in the use and quality of care because they emphasize a more holistic approach to health, thereby limiting the shame and loss of face often caused by the stigma associated with mental illness (Huang et al., 2023) . In addition, personalized care models and integration of new technologies are proposed as future directions to further enhance older adults health care services (Felix, 2017) .

4. Discussion

Firstly, the need to access and use social work services for mental health care of the older adults is increasingly important due to the increase in mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, etc. of the older adults. The need to access and use social work services in mental health care of the older adults is reflected in the need to have knowledge about mental health and the need to intervene and use social work services for mental health care. However, the older adults face many barriers in accessing social work services for mental health care, including self-stigma, misconceptions about aging and lack of understanding about mental health, financial constraints, limitations in available services, etc.

In general, studies show that the older adults have many needs in mental health care, it is worth noting that there are differences in mental health care needs among different groups of older adults. However, studies focusing on the mental health care needs of the older adults, studies on the need to access and use social work services in mental health care for the older adults are limited. Moreover, most studies are conducted on groups of older adults in the community. While the older adults living in concentrated care facilities also have their own characteristics, with their own needs to access and use social work services for mental health care. Therefore, it is not clear how the need to access and use social work services in mental health care of the older adults in concentrated care facilities is, what are the characteristics or differences compared to the older adults living in the community. Furthermore, studies in the world and in Vietnam mainly clarify the mental health care needs of the older adults from the perspective of the medical or psychological sector, lacking the perspective of the social work sector. Therefore, this is a gap that needs to be clarified and this topic will attempt to clarify the need to access and use social work services in mental health care for the older adults living in centralized care facilities.

Social work services play a vital role in influencing mental health outcomes of older adults by addressing various aspects of health, helping to build community participation, enhancing social cohesion, thereby improving mental health and providing support. Social workers are professionals with deep understanding, knowledge and skills to support older people in their mental health care. The integration of physical and behavioral health care is even more necessary today; online interventions and delivery of psychological and social care services; changes in policies and strategic partnerships of senior support centers, introduction of new high-tech tools to deliver online social work interventions; participation in the implementation and monitoring of new initiatives of online club models, etc. deployed by social work for the mental health of older adults. In addition, the activities of social workers are a potential resource to support groups of medical staff and mental health professionals in the treatment group. Although social work has made significant progress, there are still many challenges in developing and expanding this service, especially in raising public awareness of mental health. Many difficulties and limitations in terms of public awareness, facilities, etc. make these activities not really effective and are focusing on physical health care for the older adults. The service system and activities to meet the mental health care needs of the older adults have not met this need of the older adults. This is the reason why mental health care activities for the older adults are mainly based on medical and psychological approaches and the role of social work is still lacking. However, up to now, within the scope of accessing and searching for documents, there are very few in-depth studies from the social work perspective in mental health care for the older adults and especially rare studies on social work services in mental health care for the older adults living in centralized care facilities.

To enhance access to and utilize communities of social work services in mental health care for the older adults, the study suggests the following recommendations: Firstly, increase public awareness: Implement campaigns to educate on the significance of mental health and highlight the vital role of social work in this area. Besides, specialized training should be expanded: Develop and promote targeted training programs for social workers, focusing on mental health care for older adults. In addition, diverse service networks establish a wider range of social work services, particularly within residential care facilities, to better meet the needs of older adults. Moreover, foster interdisciplinary collaboration: Strengthen healthcare partnerships between providers, social workers, and community organizations to deliver more comprehensive and integrated care solutions.

There are some future research directions: The first is exploring specific needs: Conduct in-depth studies on the unique characteristics of social work service needs in mental health care for particular groups of older adults, such as those living alone or individuals from minority communities. The second, leveraging digital technology: Investigate the integration of digital tools into mental health care for older adults (digital geriatric mental health care), including the development of mobile applications and remote monitoring systems. The third is assessing interdisciplinary models: Evaluate the effectiveness of integrated interdisciplinary models involving healthcare, social work, and community organizations in enhancing the quality of life for elderly populations. The fourth is examining informal support networks: Study the impact of informal support systems, such as family and friends, on the mental health and well-being of older adults. The fifth is cultural influences on mental health: Analyze the role of indigenous cultural practices (e.g., mindfulness activities at temples) in improving the mental health of elderly individuals, particularly in Vietnam and Asia countries.

5. Conclusion

Mental health conditions among older adults are becoming increasingly common, requiring appropriate support services to meet this need. Social work plays a role in developing and implementing effective mental health care services for this group.

It is still unclear how the social work service needs of the older adults in residential care facilities and how their needs have been met. Therefore, the development of a mental health care service system and the role of social workers in residential care facilities, and the development of an integrated interdisciplinary care model are key factors to ensure the quality of life for the older adults. It is necessary to improve facilities, policies and human resource training, etc. This contributes to the study of the necessary factors to build and develop social work services, better meeting the needs of the older adults in residential care facilities in mental health care.

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