Healing Reading: Innovative Operation Mechanism of County-level Public Library Branches

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ABSTRACT

Amid the high-quality development of public cultural services, county-level library branches tend to be "badged but barely operated." This paper examines the application of "bibliotherapy," using case studies to distill innovative pathways in service models and resource integration. Findings show that bibliotherapy precisely serves left-behind children and empty-nest elders by addressing psychological needs, while enabling branches to transform through integrated, digital, and brand-oriented operations. The cases demonstrate broad applicability and scalability, grounding the proposed "Bibliotherapy-Driven Branch Operating Model" as a reference for innovating county public-library branch mechanisms.

Keywords: *County-level public library branches, Operating mechanism, Bibliotherapy-driven model, Innovation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the construction of China's public cultural service system has been continuously deepened, and significant progress has been made in the production of county-level public library branches as an important component. As of June 2022, 2,642 counties (cities, districts) in China have established a system of general branch libraries, with a total of 58,258 branch libraries. However, many branch libraries still suffer from the phenomenon of "heavy branding and light operation", facing problems such as uneven resources, single services, and a shortage of professional talents. With the promotion of rural revitalization strategy and the sinking of college students' employment, the operating environment of branch offices has improved, and there is an urgent need to innovate service models to meet the needs of the masses, especially the psychological and cultural needs of vulnerable groups.

1.1 Concept and Practice of Healing Reading

Healing reading is a structured intervention method aimed at restoring psychological well-being and promoting personal growth. It scientifically selects texts with therapeutic potential based on certain psychological needs and cultural backgrounds, and guides participants to consciously integrate the content of the text with their own experiences through a standardized process that includes preparation, reading, and reflection in a safe environment (or individual self-guidance framework) created by professional guides. The aim is to trigger positive changes in cognition, emotion, and behavior, and evaluate the intervention effect through quantitative indicators, ultimately serving the psychological healing goals of specific populations in clear scenarios.

Healing reading has been widely practiced both domestically and internationally. The British Public Library has a "Reading Therapy Prescription Book", and Taiwanese scholars have conducted a systematic study on children's emotional therapy reading. In Chinese Mainland, Professor Xu Yan of Nanjing University and other scholars advocated "reading therapy" as a new starting point for all people to read, and the library of North China University of Technology and other institutions have carried out relevant bibliography recommendation activities.

1.2 Research Value and Innovation Points

Existing research has two gaps: one is the lack of innovative exploration into the operational mechanisms of county-level public library branches, and the other is the insufficient systematic application research on therapeutic reading at the branch level. Most studies focus on community or rural libraries, primarily targeting "active readers," while neglecting the special needs of "silent readers" such as left-behind children and individuals with disabilities.

This study proposes "healing reading" as a breakthrough for innovative branch library services, exploring novel approaches for county-level library branches to serve vulnerable groups and address psychological needs by constructing a "healing-driven branch library operation model". This initiative not only helps enhance the service efficiency of branch libraries but also provides practical references for the equalization and precision of public cultural services.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

2.1 Research Objectives

County-level public library branches need to provide "healing reading" innovative services beyond basic services to precisely meet the needs of vulnerable groups, thereby promoting their own sustainable development, which is the research significance. Specific objectives include:

The first is to analyze the operational status and issues of branch libraries, identify bottlenecks in resource allocation and service content, and provide a basis for innovative approaches; the second is to summarize Chinese and international theories, cases, and outcomes of "healing reading," and extract its applicability in grassroots public cultural services; the third is to leverage big data to analyze the needs and psychological characteristics of groups such as left-behind children and empty-nest elderly, and construct a "healing reading" service model; the fourth is to take "healing reading" as a starting point to explore innovative pathways for optimizing branch library operations, enhancing public participation and impact, ultimately providing theoretical and practical guidance for service innovation in branch libraries and promoting the improvement of grassroots public cultural services.

2.2 Research Methods

Centered on the case study method, this research focuses on the therapeutic reading practices of county-level branch libraries, including: selecting 18 representative branches (covering diverse demographics) nationwide, with the Y Town Branch of the Lian Mountain County Library in Jiangxi as the key case; collecting textual materials from the 18 branches, conducting on-site observations at the Y Town Branch, and compiling both quantitative and qualitative data; employing content and comparative analysis methods to identify commonalities and differences among the cases, comparing the practices of the Y Town Branch to summarize experiences; and conducting the study through steps including subject selection, data collection, coding and organization, and comparative analysis.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1 Analysis of National Typical Case Codes in China

This study analyzed 8 core cases (closer to the theme), including: the establishment of the first branch of Yanbian Library in Yanbian Brain Hospital in Jilin Province, the addition of Shukang Psychiatric Hospital service point in Ningyuan County Library in Hunan Province, the socialization cooperation of Baihe County Library in Shaanxi Province to enrich the urban and rural areas with books, Zhenping County in Shaanxi Province to allow people to enjoy reading pleasure at their doorstep, Lianshui County Library in Huai'an, Jiangsu Province's "Reading Healing Rural Journey" to safeguard the healthy growth of rural children, Yuyue Town in Deqing County, Huzhou, Zhejiang Province's rich book fragrance to nourish the spiritual flower, Tanghu Library in Caidian, Wuhan, Hubei Province's most beautiful grassroots library to add a "spiritual refueling station for employees", and Xiaonan District Library in Xiaogan, Hubei Province to care for special groups and convey cultural warmth.

On this basis, this study also coded and analyzed 10 related cases (related to the theme), including the opening and use of the Traditional Chinese Medicine Smart Library in Nanhai District, Foshan, Guangdong, the creation of the "Reading Psychological Healing" service brand by the Social Development Bureau of HuangBohai New Area, Yantai, Shandong, the "Amazing Parents" Family

Healing Plan of Jiashan County Library in Zhejiang, the book fragrance infiltrating the soul healing library in Wuliqiao Street Library, Huangpu, Shanghai, warming the corners of the city, the iterative public cultural services of Yuhang District Library in Zhejiang, the construction of the "Healthy Living Room" beautiful town in Xieqiao Town, Haining, Zhejiang, adding "life beauty", and the "AI" of Nanjiang Library in Bazhong, Sichuan The "Heart Station" warmth having been launched to create a haven for the soul, Yunnan Kaiyuan Library holdding the 25th "Bright Heart Lamp, Enlighten Mind" special children's reading service activity, Guangdong Fengkai County Library promoting reading for minors, and Shandong Jinan Shanghe County Library launching the province's first parent-child "psychological healing" reading promotion activity.

Through analysis, the researchers had extracted innovative models for the operation mechanism of county-level library branches, and summarized their innovative characteristics and replicable experiences.

3.1.1 Scenario-embedded Therapy: Activate Reading Therapy Function with "Space + Context"

The typical cases including: Zhongjia Courtyard Cultural Station in Baihe County, Ankang Reading Bar in Zhenping County, and Staff Spiritual Refueling Station in Tanghu Library. The core mechanism is: embedding reading spaces into living scenes such as scenic spots, hotels, communities, and enterprises, creating "fragmented" and "immersive" healing scenes, lowering service barriers, and improving accessibility. The innovative feature is: replacing traditional battlefield services with "spatial co construction+situational creation" to achieve the functional integration of "reading as healing" and "scene as service".

3.1.2 Group-targeted Therapy: Responding to Special Needs with "Precise Identification + Customized Services"

The typical cases include: Yanbian Brain Hospital Branch, Shukang Hospital Service Point in Ningyuan County, "Sending Books to Home" Disability Service in Xiaonan District, and "Bright Heart Lamp" Special Children's Reading Activity in Kaiyuan City. The core mechanism is: focusing on

"silent readers" such as mental illness patients, disabled persons, and special children, through precise resource matching, on-site services, reading+manual/psychological support, etc., to achieve dual healing of "reading intervention" and "psychological support". The innovative features are: breaking through the traditional logic of "waiting for people to come door-to-door", establishing a closed-loop mechanism of "demand identification resource matching service delivery", and enhancing the cultural sense of achievement of vulnerable groups.

3.1.3 Family Relationship Therapy: Reconstructing the Family Support System with "Parent-Child Reading + Psychological Education"

The typical cases include: Jiashan County's "Amazing Parents" project, Shanghe County's "Bookish Shanghe · Heart Companionship" parent-child reading, Haining's "Healthy Living Room". The core mechanism is: building a three-dimensional service system of "graded reading + psychological guidance + community support" around family psychological issues such as parent-child anxiety and parenting conflicts, and promoting the library to become a center for family education support. The innovative feature is: expanding reading services from "children's education" to "family healing", so as to realize the extension of library services from "individuals" to "family systems".

3.1.4 Technology-empowered Healing: Achieving Personalized and Intelligent Services through "AI+Data"

The typical cases include: "AI Mind Station" in Nanjiang County, "Muxin Reading Healing Reading Area" in Yuhang District, and "Traditional Chinese Medicine Smart Library" in Nanhai District. The core mechanism is: introducing AI emotion recognition, intelligent book list recommendation, digital resource package and other technological means to achieve an intelligent service chain of "emotion evaluation resource matching effect tracking". The innovative features are: replacing manual labor with technology, solving the problem of shortage of professional personnel in grassroots libraries, and promoting the transformation of healing reading services from "experience driven" to "data-driven".

3.1.5 Cross-border Collaboration Mechanism: Promoting Resource Restructuring and Service Extension Through "Library+"

The typical cases include: Yantai "Book Fragrance Healing · Heart Reading Harbor" (library+marriage registration center), Deqing Yuyue Town "Yuyue Study" (library+Xinhua Bookstore), Zhaoqing Fengkai County "Enterprise Park Self Service Library" (library+enterprise). The core mechanism is: introducing multiple entities such as psychological institutions, enterprises, and social organizations through the co-construction model of "government led, social participation, and professional support" to form a service ecology of "complementary resources and overlapping functions". The innovative features are: breaking the "individual combat" pattern of libraries, building a collaborative network of "public culture+professional services+market mechanism", and enhancing service sustainability and social influence.

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Five Practical Models

Based on practical case studies, this study summarizes five typical practical models of "healing-driven" county-level library branches.

The scenario embedded mode emphasizes the activation of implicit healing functions through spatial context design. For example, a county library has transformed a traditional reading room into a "spiritual relay station", creating a reading environment with natural healing effects through the application of spatial zoning, color psychology, and environmental psychology principles, allowing readers to obtain psychological comfort unconsciously. The group targeted model provides precise services to specific groups with explicit needs. For left-behind children, the "Reading with Growth" project is launched to help them deal with separation anxiety and establish positive self-awareness through carefully selected books and structured activity design; Design a 'memory study' for the elderly to delay cognitive decline through nostalgic reading. The family relationship model reconstructs the family support system through parent-child reading. Typical cases such as the "Parent-Child Healing Reading Camp", guide parents and children to participate in narrative therapy-oriented reading activities, improve

communication patterns, strengthens emotional connections, and are particularly suitable for families with tense relationships or facing pressure. The technology empowerment model utilizes digital technologies such as AI to compensate for the shortage of professional manpower. For example, a "healing reading recommendation system" that analyzes readers' emotional states and reading preferences through algorithms can be developed to provide personalized book recommendations; Chatbots can be used to provide basic psychological support, service coverage and accessibility should be expanded. The cross-border collaborative model integrates multiple subject resources to form a service synergy. If the library cooperates with the psychiatric department of the hospital to carry out the "prescription reading" project, doctors will use specific books as auxiliary treatment methods, and the library will provide supporting resources and services; Collaborate with community social work organizations to integrate reading therapy into community mental health promotion work.

4.2 Innovation Value and Transformation Significance

The "healing-driven" service model provides triple innovative value for the transformation and upgrading of county-level library branches.

In terms of service philosophy, a fundamental transformation has been achieved from knowledge transmission to psychological support. Libraries are no longer just information providers, but have become important nodes in the community mental health ecosystem, expanding the social functional boundaries of public cultural institutions. In terms of operational mechanism, we have innovated the governance model from government led to diversified collaboration. By introducing social forces and professional organizations, the administrative monopoly of public cultural service supply has been broken, forming a more dynamic and adaptable service network. In the evaluation system, the quality and efficiency perspective has been upgraded from service statistics to effectiveness tracking. The traditional evaluation method based on borrowing volume and number of visitors has shifted towards focusing on the substantial impact of services on readers' psychological well-being and social functions, promoting the transformation of library services towards a results-oriented approach.

5. CONCLUSION

This study takes "healing reading" as the core entry point, and systematically explores the innovative operation mechanism of county-level public library branches through the analysis of 19 cases nationwide. The core conclusions are as follows:

Firstly, innovative operational mechanisms are the core path for the sustainable development of branch offices. County-level branch offices need to leverage resource integration (cross departmental cooperation, participation of social forces), digital construction (digital resource platform, reading and healing archives), and brand operation ("healing study", "book fragrance prescription", etc.) to solve the problem of "heavy listing and light operation", achieve the transformation from single service to diversified service, passive supply to active service, and inject new momentum into the high-quality development of grassroots public cultural services.

Secondly, healing reading is an important lever for innovation in branch services. As a characteristic service, healing reading can respond to the spiritual needs of "silent readers", activate service scenarios, resource integration, and institutional design, and promote the transformation of branch libraries from "resource endpoints" to "spiritual hubs". Through forms such as emotional classification booklets, interactive reading activities, and psychological therapy projects, not only can service depth be enhanced, but social value and influence can also be strengthened, which is the key "first move" to activate the operation of branch libraries.

Thirdly, healing reading services are showing a trend of "four modernizations" and promoting institutional restructuring. Scene embedding, group targeting, family systematization, and technological intelligence are not isolated, but rather form an innovative lineage of "space content mechanism technology" collaborative evolution with "healing" as the core. At the same time, they drive innovation in cooperation mechanisms, resource integration, service standards, and other aspects of branch libraries, becoming catalysts for the transformation from construction to use.

Fourthly, healing reading has a "leverage effect", and in the future, it is necessary to use it as a fulcrum to build a modern service system that is "layered, classified, online and offline, professional and inclusive". It can leverage service level, social recognition, and policy support with relatively small resource investment, and is a low-cost, high emotional, and sustainable solution for underdeveloped areas. It is recommended to include it in the grassroots public cultural service standards and promote branch offices to become nodes for grassroots social governance and mental health support.

In addition, the study fills the gap in systematic research on healing reading in county-level branch libraries, providing actionable guidance, but there are limitations: limited case sample coverage, insufficient long-term effect evaluation, and late start of digital service exploration. In the future, it is necessary to expand the sample, conduct follow-up research, and optimize services by combining AI and big data. Overall, the mechanism innovation led by healing reading is a beneficial attempt to improve the level of grassroots public cultural services, achieve equalization and precision, and the county-level branch is expected to play a more important role in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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