

**STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL
WORKER IN THE PROTECTION FOR
VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN CHENGDU,
CHINA**

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**STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL
WORKER IN THE PROTECTION FOR
VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN CHENGDU, CHINA**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

OVC	Orphan and Vulnerable Children
VC	Vulnerable Children
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia
CPC	Communist Party of China
LBC	Left-behind Children
HHS	Health and Human Services
ACF	Administration for Children and Families
CWPC	Children Without Parental Care
CMP	Child Maltreatment Prevention
CPS	Child Protection Service
PDPA	Personal Data Protection Act
CMP	Child Maltreatment Prevention
STS	Secondary Traumatic Stress
CNKI	China National Knowledge Infrastructure
MCA	Ministry of Civil Affairs
EPS	Empowerment Participation Strengths
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations

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**PENGUKUHAN PERANAN PEKERJA SOSIAL DALAM
PERLINDUNGAN TERHADAP KANAK-KANAK RENTAN DI CHENGDU,
CHINA**

ABSTRAK

Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menganalisis situasi semasa dalam melindungi kanak-kanak yang terdedah, mengukur kesediaan pekerja sosial untuk melindungi kanak-kanak yang terdedah, menilai cabaran yang dihadapi oleh pekerja sosial dalam usaha ini, dan mencadangkan model intervensi kerja sosial untuk meningkatkan perlindungan terhadap kanak-kanak yang terdedah. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka bagaimana pekerja sosial melindungi kanak-kanak rentan di China. Chengdu dipilih sebagai lokasi kajian, dan kaedah penyelidikan kualitatif digunakan untuk menemubual 20 orang pekerja sosial. Perisian analisis NVivo Plus 12 digunakan untuk menganalisis soalan kajian secara tematik. Pertama, keperluan kanak-kanak rentan merangkumi keperluan asas untuk hidup, keperluan dilindungi, keperluan psikologi, dan keperluan sokongan sosial. Kebanyakan sumber kewangan perkhidmatan organisasi berasal dari kerajaan. Praktis pekerja sosial untuk kanak-kanak rentan termasuk perkhidmatan perlindungan, bantuan, sokongan, pembangunan, dan advokasi. Pekerja sosial bekerjasama dengan sistem lain, seperti masyarakat, pengarah kanak-kanak, dan institusi lain. Kedua, kesediaan pekerja sosial melibatkan pelbagai dasar dan pertubuhan profesional kerajaan dan sosial. Tambahan

pula, ia melibatkan kelebihan profesional pekerja sosial, peranan perkhidmatan, nilai profesional, kaedah profesional, dan hubungan sumber. Ketiga, kesulitan yang dihadapi oleh pekerja sosial yang terlibat dalam perlindungan kanak-kanak rentan termasuk mobiliti pekerja sosial dan kekurangan kapasiti di peringkat Mikro. Di peringkat Meso, kesulitan melibatkan masyarakat, keluarga kanak-kanak yang dalam kesusahan, dan pertubuhan sosial. Di peringkat Makro, cabaran termasuk perbezaan bandar-luar bandar, kesan buruk sistem berasaskan projek, dan pengiktirafan sosial yang tidak mencukupi terhadap pekerjaan sosial dan keberkesanan perkhidmatan pekerjaan sosial. Penemuan keempat mengemukakan cadangan tindak balas untuk melindungi kanak-kanak rentan. Dengan dipandukan oleh teori ekosistem, strategi seperti memperkasakan kanak-kanak rentan, menumpukan penjagaan keluarga, membangunkan perkhidmatan berasaskan masyarakat, kerja sosial sekolah sosial sekolah, memperkukuh pembinaan organisasi sosial, dan menyokong pembangunan kanak-kanak rentan oleh jabatan kerajaan dicadangkan. Akhirnya, implikasi dan limitasi kajian ini dibincangkan, termasuk menentukan arah penyelidikan seumpama ini pada masa hadapan.

**STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKER IN THE
PROTECTION FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN CHENGDU, CHINA**

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study are to analyse the current situation of protecting vulnerable children, measure social workers' readiness to protect vulnerable children, assess the challenges faced by social workers in this effort, and propose a social work intervention model to enhance the protection of vulnerable children. Chengdu was chosen as the research site, and a qualitative research method was employed to interview 20 social workers. NVivo Plus 12 analysis software was used to thematically analyze the research questions. Firstly, the needs of vulnerable children encompass basic survival needs, protected needs, psychological needs, and social support needs. Most of the organizations' service funding sources originated from the government. Social workers' practices for vulnerable children include protective, relief, supportive, developmental, and advocative services. Social workers collaborate with other systems, such as the community, child directors, and other institutions. Secondly, the readiness of social workers to protect vulnerable children involves various policies and government and social work professional organizations. Additionally, it comprises social work professional advantages, service roles, professional values, professional methods, and resource linkage. Thirdly, the difficulties faced by social workers involved in the protection of vulnerable children encompass social workers' mobility and lack of capacity at the Micro-level. At the

Meso-level, difficulties include the community, families of children in distress, and social organizations. At the Macro-level, challenges encompass urban-rural differences, the adverse effects of the project-based system, and insufficient social recognition of social work and the effectiveness of social work services. The fourth finding proposes countermeasures for protecting vulnerable children. Guided by the ecosystem theory, strategies such as empowering vulnerable children, focusing on family guardianship, developing community-based services, establishing school social work, enhancing social organization construction, and supporting vulnerable children's development by government departments are proposed. Finally, the implications and limitations of this study are discussed, including the direction for future research on similar studies.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

As the economy and society develop, the diversification of society and family structure, and the weakening of the family's function, the number of vulnerable children grows, drawing increased attention from society. The Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Chinese government pay more attention to protecting vulnerable children, such as left-behind children, migrant children, disabled children, etc. They are exploring the protection of children based on policy, concept, and practice. From the policy perspective, relevant policies are introduced by central and local governments to support vulnerable children's assistance and protection projects. From the standpoint of the concept, more attention is paid to the state's parental rights and the concept of giving priority to children. From the practice perspective, pilot work on the social protection of children has been initiated successively since 2013 (Yan, 2019).

In public policy, the government in China also changes value orientation from "Compensatory type complement type" to "Moderately Inclusive type moderate universal type" in China's child welfare system (Gao & Peng, 2015; Zhao et al., 2018). Regarding service targets, it has changed from older people, people with disabilities, and orphans to all elderly, disabled, and children in difficulty. Gao and Peng (2015) believe China's child welfare system has transformed from supplementary to inclusive. The most obvious sign is that the child welfare policy

has shifted from focusing only on orphans to needy children. The number of children receiving state-provided benefits has expanded.

The past decade has witnessed China's rapid development of social welfare policy in protecting vulnerable children. Breakthroughs have been made in the following four aspects: A basic living security system for poor children has been established. Formulated a health and medical assistance policy for poor children. The education policy for impoverished children has been improved. A social security mechanism for Vulnerable children has been established and improved (Gao & Peng, 2015). China's child welfare policy since 2010 has focused on vulnerable children and children left behind in rural areas (Qiao et al., 2019).

As a helping profession, social work has been active in elderly service, community service, and service for people with disabilities after more than 30 years of development. By the end of 2022, There are more than 530,000 certified social workers (Wei & Huang, 2022). Social work has become essential to social governance, maintaining social stability, promoting social capital growth, and improving service recipients' abilities.

In recent years, scholars and practitioners in social work have begun to pay attention to the group of vulnerable children and have explored the theoretical and practical levels.

Since 2010, many Children's rights and interests' violations have been reported in online media. The state and government have issued a large number of legal policies for rescuing and protecting this particular group of troubled children in

China. As a significant force in social governance, social work has been mentioned in relevant documents of the Party and the state that social work should actively play its role and participate in child protection.

This study focuses on the present situation of the protection of vulnerable children, Chengdu, in China, the readiness of social workers to participate in the protection of vulnerable children Chengdu in China, the difficulties faced by social workers in the protection of vulnerable children Chengdu in China; and the social work intervention model for the protection of vulnerable children. This chapter elaborates on the background of this study, problem statement, research questions, objectives, and significance of this research.

1.2 Background of Study

The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child on November 20, 1959. The Declaration defines the fundamental rights that children should enjoy in all countries. The Declaration includes ten guidelines stating that children should have the right to healthy growth, development, and education. The Declaration also states that children should be the first to receive protection and remedies in all circumstances and should not be subject to neglect, abuse, or exploitation. The General Assembly issued this Declaration in the hope that children would enjoy the rights and freedoms described in the Declaration and enjoy a happy childhood and called upon all parents and other individuals, as well as organisations and governments, to take progressive legislative and other measures to

safeguard these rights and interests of children following the guidelines of the Declaration and in the best interests of the child (Assembly, 1959). In 1984, the 44th United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the Child Rights Convention, which put forward four rights and principles children should enjoy. The four rights are the right to subsistence, the right to development, the right to protection, and the right to participation. The four principles are the principle of the best interests of children, the principle of respecting children's dignity, the principle of respecting children's ideas and opinions, and the principle of non-discrimination (UNICEF, n.d.)

At least 1 billion children globally experience some form of violence each year (UNICEF, 2019), including physical abuse, sexual abuse, gender-based violence, psychosocial abuse, forced child marriage, forced child labor, and more (Meraj, 2024)

According to the seventh national census results, as of November 1, 2020, 253 million people aged 0-14, accounting for 17.95% of the country's total population (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021). In the third quarter of 2023, there were 146,000 orphans and 388,000 de facto unattended children receiving monthly allowance support in China (Xinhua, 2024). In Sichuan, 0-14 age accounting for 16.10% the whole province population (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021).

In 2016, the "Opinions on Strengthening the Protection of Children in Distress" formulated by the State Council clarified the concept of vulnerable children.

Children in need mainly include three types of children. The first type of child faces challenges in life, medical treatment, and school due to family poverty. Due to their disabilities, the second type of child has struggled with rehabilitation, care, nursing, and social integration. Furthermore, the third kind of child is children who have suffered abuse or abandonment due to lack of family guardianship or improper guardianship, accidental injuries, and unlawful infringements that cause personal safety to be threatened or violated (State Council, 2016). The definition divides the causes of vulnerable children into three categories: family poverty, disability, and family guardianship. This study's "vulnerable children" mainly refers to the children due to family guardianship, for whom both parents cannot fully discharge their parental and custodial responsibilities. "Vulnerable children" in this study include de facto unattended children. The children in this study included the following two kinds: The first kind is children whose parents are seriously disabled, seriously ill, serving a sentence in custody, under compulsory isolation, under other measures of restriction of personal freedom, or out of contact, revocation of guardianship, deportation (expulsion); the second kind is children whose one parent is dead or missing, and the other parent is seriously ill, seriously disabled, serving a sentence in custody, under compulsory isolation, under other measures of restriction of personal freedom, or out of contact, revocation of guardianship, deportation (expulsion).

Since 2010, many children's rights and interests violations have been reported online. For example, five children die in garbage cans (*In November 16, 2012, five boys in Bijie City died of carbon monoxide poisoning by lighting a fire in a*

trash can to keep warm);the starvation of a girl in Nanjing in 2013 (*In June 21, 2013, two girls in Nanjing were found dead at home due to unattended starvation*); the malignant case of harming children in Fenxi County, Linfen City, Shanxi Province in 2013 (*In August 24, 2013, a 6-year-old boy playing in front of his home in Fenxi County, Shanxi Province was severely injured in his eyes. After investigation, the suspect was the boy's aunt*); the suicide case of children taking drugs in 2015 (*In June 9, 2015, four left-behind children in Bijie City died of pesticide poisoning at their home, and their parents were working outside all year round*); and the “abuse by the Shanghai Ctrip Parent-Child Garden” in November 2017 (*In November, 2017, a series of videos went viral on WeChat. One clip showed staff members at Ctrip daycare in shanghai pushing a kid violently and being forced to eat something like wasabi*). “Children” video, the red, yellow, and blue kindergarten “child abuse” incident was exposed at the end of 2017 (*In November 2017, The Red, Yellow Blue (RYB) kindergarten scandal in Beijing shook the country. Many parents charged that children in a class were jabbed with needles, fed pills, and forced to strip naked*). These incidents have aroused public debate.

Faced with many vulnerable children and various hurt cases, the state and government have issued many legal policies for rescuing and protecting this particular group of troubled children. Since 2011, China has designated December 12 as “Concern Day for vulnerable children.” Since the 18th National Congress of the Party, the child welfare work of the Ministry of Civil Affairs has been extended from the traditional abandoned special children to the left-behind children and vulnerable

children. In 2013, the Ministry of Civil Affairs carried out pilot projects on constructing a moderately inclusive child welfare system and social protection of minors to promote the development of children's welfare in China. The protection of vulnerable children is one of the critical tasks for the Chinese government.

In 2016, the State Council successively issued the Opinions on Strengthening the Care and Protection of Children Left Behind in Rural Areas and the Opinions on Strengthening the Protection of Vulnerable Children. In 2019, the Ministry of Civil Affairs established a new Department of Child Welfare to take child welfare (Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022). The Child Welfare Department's specific responsibilities include formulating policies and standards for child welfare, protection of orphaned and abandoned children, child adoption, child assistance and protection; improving the care service system for left-behind children in rural areas, and the security system for distressed children; Furthermore, guiding child welfare management, adoption registration, assistance, and protection institutions (Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022). Since then, the work of China's children has entered a new stage of development.

As for the institutional framework of child protection in China, relevant domestic and international laws and regulations have been issued or introduced to guide and standardise the work of child protection and safeguard the rights and interests of children in a new era (Li & Yuan, 2014)). At the international level, China has signed, ratified, and acceded to major international conventions on child

protection, such as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Domestically, the principal regulations related to protecting vulnerable children are the *Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency Law of the People's Republic of China* and the *Civil Code of the People's Republic of China*. The Law on the Protection of Minors, revised in October 2020, has identified six significant protections: judicial protection, government protection, family protection, network protection, community protection, and social protection. The Law on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency came into force on June 1, 2021. Article 9 mentions that the state encourages, supports, and guides social organisations such as social work service agencies to prevent juvenile delinquency and strengthen supervision. As a significant force in social governance, social work has been mentioned in relevant documents of the Party and the state that social work should actively play its role and participate in child protection.

The researcher participated in the regional supervision service work implemented by the Chengdu Juvenile Aid and Protection Centre from 2021 to 2023. This regional supervision work primarily involves providing social work supervision and support to child supervisors, child directors, and child social workers in the 23 districts and counties of Chengdu. During the supervision work, the researcher discovered that child protection work in Chengdu faces various challenges, one of which is how social workers can participate in the protection of vulnerable children. Therefore, based on personal experience and interests, the researcher conducted this research.

1.3 Problem Statement

There are about 500,000 de facto unattended children in China. These children generally suffer from relatively low living standards, it is difficult to obtain effective guardianship, and some children have psychological problems. In 2022, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Supreme People's Court, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Finance, and the All-China Women's Federation recently 12 other departments jointly issued the "Opinions on Further Strengthening the Protection of Factually orphan Children" (People's Network, 2019).

According to a report by the Girls' Protection Project, in 2021, there were 223 reported cases of child sexual abuse in China, involving 569 victims. Of these cases, 91% involved female victims and 7.6% involved male victims. The majority of these crimes were committed by acquaintances, and about 80% of the victims were under the age of 14 (China Development Brief, 2022). About crimes against minors, from 2018 to 2022, 290,000 individuals were charged with crimes against minors in China, with 131,000 prosecuted for sexual offenses such as rape and child molestation. Approximately 41% of those prosecuted received prison sentences longer than three years, which is significantly higher than the general rate for all criminals (Wikipedia, 2024).

According to a systematic review and meta-analysis by (Fu et al., 2018), reported prevalence of various forms of childhood maltreatment among Chinese college students is as follows: childhood physical abuse at 17.4%, childhood

emotional abuse at 36.7%, childhood sexual abuse at 15.7%, childhood physical neglect at 54.9%, and childhood emotional neglect at 60.0%. Zhou et al.(2019) researched child maltreatment in western China and found 12.3%, 14.0%, 1.3% and 28.1% of the children experienced physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and neglect, respectively, while 186 children (12.3%) experienced multiple types of maltreatment. In China, people regarding child abuse are resentment and vengefulness (Lyu et al., 2020). From a National Survey of Chinese Social Workers, Fu et al,(2024)stated only 14.4 per cent of social workers from China had ever reported suspected child abuse.

The scope and level of child welfare protection has been significantly expanded, with the scope of protection extended from orphans and abandoned infants to children in difficult circumstances, and the standard of protection continuously raised (Song, 2024). However, there is an urgent need to improve the balance and accessibility of public services for children (Song, 2024).

China has made remarkable progress in the area of child protection in recent years, introducing a series of policies and regulations. The opinions on strengthening the protection of children in distress issued by the State Council in 2016, the newly revised Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Minors in 2020, the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of Family Education, and the Law on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency all mention the participation of social work, which provides a legal basis for social work participation in the protection of vulnerable children.

Some laws in China significantly impact social workers' participation in child protection. The Anti-Domestic Violence Act which is developed in 2015 refers to the social worker's role in preventing and treating domestic violence. In China, the Civil Code promulgated in 2020 comprehensively strengthens the protection of the civil rights of minors and improves the child guardianship system. The government and judicial protection departments mention social work in the China Minors Protection Law. The People's Republic of China Law on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency in 2021 enabling social workers to contribute to juvenile delinquency prevention. The "Family Education Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China," which officially came into effect on January 1, 2022, explicitly encourages social workers to participate in family education guidance services.

The Opinions of the State Council's Leading Group for the Protection of Minors on Strengthening the Protection of Minors was published in June 2021. It stated that it is necessary to vigorously develop professional social work and volunteer services to protect minors and fully support the development of social workers devoted to child safety. Consider professional advantages such as resource connections, capacity building, psychological intervention, proper protection, legal services, social surveys, social observations, educational corrections, community corrections, and adoption evaluations. We actively guide volunteers in their efforts to safeguard children.

Zhao and Zhu (2019) point out that child protection research in China started later than in developed western countries. In the future, there is still a need to

integrate modern child welfare thinking with Chinese culture and the welfare system and to conduct in-depth discussions on specific service models, processes, and methods based on a shared understanding of the concepts, concepts, laws, and policy systems.

Dai (2014) stated that the relief system for children in distress has the following problems: lack of a mechanism to identify and report children in distress, the scope of identification of children in distress is too narrow, relief services cannot meet the needs of children in distress, there are gaps in relief funds, poor channels for long-term relief for children in distress, inadequate laws and regulations related to children in distress, and limited participation of non-profit organisations in relief.

Man and Wang (2016) believed that China's approach to child welfare is limited. These limitations are most evident in the child welfare system's design, which employs the traditional welfare strategy of "problem orientation." This is explicitly embodied in the following three facets: Child welfare is concerned with rescuing children who have developed into troubled children; the child welfare system is designed to "emphasise children and neglect families"; the primary body of child welfare is small, and the welfare supply method is single. In terms of top-level design, Zhang (2017) believes that China's welfare system is fragmented, as evidenced by the unification of welfare providers, welfare content, and the simplification and limitation of welfare delivery methods. Li and Yuan (2014) also said that child protection systems face challenges such as a lack of a cohesive protection, a reliance on a single type of protection, a dearth of integration

mechanisms, insufficient social participation, and a sluggish service delivery system. In China, meta-analytic evidence indicates that the prevalence rates of self-reported childhood maltreatment before the age of 18 are 174 per 1000 children for physical abuse, 367 per 1000 for emotional abuse, 549 per 1000 for physical neglect, and 600 per 1000 for emotional neglect (Fu et al., 2018).

Yao (2019) identifies six critical issues that must be addressed to protect children in China: It is challenging to discover, report, intervene, coordinate, supervise, and hold accountable. China faces numerous challenges in special protection for minors in distress, particularly those victims of sexual assault and other illegal and criminal acts. These challenges include fragmented relevant laws and regulations, a lack of a comprehensive evaluation system, insufficient assistance agencies and staff, and an imperfect supporting mechanism (Research Group of People's Procuratorate of Minhang District, 2020).

Existing studies show that social workers play a very important role in child protection. Huang et al. (2021) argue that professional social work has unique advantages in areas such as guardianship of children in distress that are unmatched by other professions. Professional social workers must play an active role in the identification, service, referral, and assessment.

Problems in implementing child protection policies for vulnerable children include weak social work construction and low professionalism. Based on a survey of left-behind children in Jiangsu Province, Yang (2016) found that the grassroots government has not set up positions for professionals, the number of professional

social workers is small, and ordinary grassroots workers are working as social workers. To a certain extent, they lack professional social work concepts such as gender equality and children's rights.

Globally, child protection social workers are exposed to risks and adversities whilst performing their duties. Boonzaaier et al. (2021) stated Occupational risk factors include intrapersonal-level risks, interpersonal-level risks, institutional-level risks, community-level risks, and policy-level risk factors.

Although child protection policies exist, enforcement at local levels is characterised by sectorial fragmentation (Chui & Jordan, 2018). Social workers involved in child protection still face many difficulties in participating in the protection of vulnerable children. In addition, among grassroots child workers, the mobility and lack of professionalism of child directors also affect the provision of protection for vulnerable children.

In Chengdu, China, what is the current situation of the protection of vulnerable children in difficult circumstances? How can social workers participate more effectively in the protection of children in difficult circumstances? What are the main barriers that currently exist? How well social workers play their role as an important force in protecting children's rights and interests has become a matter of concern.

If these problems are not solved, the rights and interests of vulnerable children will not be effectively protected and social stability and development will be affected. Solving these problems will help improve the efficiency and effectiveness

of Chengdu's child protection work and provide valuable references for policy makers and practitioners.

The objective of this study is to identify the main challenges faced by social workers in Chengdu, China, in the protection of vulnerable children through field research and data analysis, and to propose practical recommendations for improvement in order to enhance the effectiveness of social workers' work and ensure that children in distress are better protected.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the present situation in protecting vulnerable children?
2. How ready are the social workers to participate in protecting vulnerable children?
3. What challenges did the social worker face in protecting vulnerable children?
4. What measures can help social workers participate in the protection of vulnerable children?

1.5 Research Objectives

1. To analyse the present situation of protecting of vulnerable children.
2. To measure the social worker's readiness to protect vulnerable children.
3. To measure the challenges faced by the social worker in protecting vulnerable children.

4. To propose social work intervention model to enhance the protection of vulnerable children.

1.6 Significance of the Research

Child protection research in China starts relatively later; the left-behind children, street children, migrant children protection, and the rights of children and children's welfare policy research have formed a series of research results. Nevertheless, some issues remain: The research teams are not inextricably linked. There is no consensus regarding the purpose and meaning of child protection. Child protection is not addressed in a unified child welfare framework.

This study focuses on vulnerable children's protection and discusses the feasibility and strategies of social work intervention. This study will have a positive impact on theory and practice.

First, from the perspective of social work, this study will discuss the current situation and problems of protecting vulnerable children, which will help understand the basement of social work's participation.

Secondly, this study will enrich the research results on protecting vulnerable children. In the past ten years, the academic research results on protecting vulnerable children have been few, and the characteristics of policy precedence are presented. This study will enrich the results. It also alleviates the dilemma that research on vulnerable children lags behind the policy.

Thirdly, this study can provide theoretical references for relevant government departments to formulate social work to protect vulnerable children in policy advocacy.

Besides, this study will provide a reference for promoting social work to protect vulnerable children based on Chinese cultural background. It can guide children's social work organisations to design children's service projects and help children's social workers carry out social work cultivation and practice.

The research on the protection of vulnerable children is conducive to enriching the results of child protection research, guiding the front-line social worker to provide better services, making policy suggestions, and advocating for relevant government departments.

1.7 Chapters Summary

This chapter provides an introduction and background to the main topic of the study. Additionally, this chapter elaborates on the problem statement of the study, along with its research questions and objectives. It concludes with an explanation of the study's significance, the scope of the research, and a brief summary of each chapter in the thesis.

Chapter two covered a comprehensive literature review of the thesis. All the literature is designed to ensure that they coincide with the research questions and objectives. The chapter also examines relevant studies involving child protection and

child social worker. It also explores theoretical and conceptual framework discussed in chapter two.

Chapter three provides an in-depth explanation of the research methodology employed in the study. It details the research design, population, sample, and rationale. The chapter also thoroughly discusses the research instruments, location, data collection, and analysis procedures. It concludes with a discussion of the pilot study, the validity and reliability of the research, and the ethical considerations involved.

Chapter four presents the study's findings derived from the data collected from research informants. This chapter provides a detailed elaboration on the socio-demographic background of the research informants. The collected data are analysed, with a narrative presentation reflecting the reliance on in-depth interviews as the primary data source. Overall, Chapter four provides a detailed analysis of the present situation in protecting vulnerable children, readiness the social workers, the challenges did the social worker, intervention model protection of vulnerable children. Reported research findings are also based on the research objectives.

Chapter five presented an in-depth discussion of the research findings. This chapter thoroughly discussed research findings based on the present situation, social worker's readiness, the challenges and intervention model of protecting VC critically and comprehensively. This chapter also covers the implications for social work practice, education, theoretical. Finally, it addresses research limitations, suggests directions for future studies, and provides a conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This study gathered data from the literature using a variety of search engines, including Web of Science database, EBSCO database and ProQuest database, Wiley online library, Google Scholar, CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), Scopus database, and various official websites. This chapter discussed the current state of child protection, the readiness of social workers to protect vulnerable children, the challenges social workers face in protecting vulnerable children, and social work practice in protecting children. Then, discuss the research's shortcomings and areas to continue studying.

2.2 The Present Situation of Protecting Vulnerable Children

This section focuses on understanding the current state of child protection in other countries and the responsible departments and operating procedures. Besides that, this section also focuses on affiliated scholars researching the concept of vulnerable children and the developmental stage of vulnerable child research in China.

2.2.1 In Other Countries

In the United States, the federal government has taken on protecting children in various fields and varying degrees. For instance, the Department of Housing and Urban Development administers housing subsidies to children and families. In contrast, the Department of Education administers a program that ensures children's

education. However, the Department of Health and Human Services is primarily responsible for child protection (HHS). HHS is divided into 11 departments, with child protection responsibilities concentrated in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) (He, 2013).

The United States is specifically responsible for children's work through the Children and Family Administration Department, housed within the Federal Department of Health and Human Services. The Children and Family Administration Department primarily assists families and children in the United States through project development (Zeng, 2011). Additionally, the department provides funding for emergency asylum, housing, and crisis intervention services, educates vulnerable children, assists them in reuniting with their families, and provides referral services related to these activities (Zeng, 2011). For instance, through project acquisition, implement community-based adolescent alcohol rehabilitation programs, provide psychological tutors to children of community prisoners, and make full use of the community to conduct intervention and prevention work with vulnerable children. The Children's Bureau is one of the administrative divisions of the Department of Children and Families. It is primarily responsible for child welfare projects, including investigations into and resolving child abuse and neglect allegations and preventive services. It is responsible for funding child welfare projects and services, training child-specific staff, evaluating and improving child welfare projects, and developing child welfare information portal websites (Chen, 2008).

Save the Children in the United Kingdom gradually recognised the importance of a community-based protection mechanism in assisting the government and society in protecting children from harm and thus began collaborating with the government and local governments to establish community-based, inclusive, and participatory demonstration points in order to develop a community child protection model (Zhou & Zhang, 2006).

In developed western countries, the involvement of social organisations in protecting vulnerable children has gradually become a trend and mainstream, complementing the government and communities as the primary bodies responsible for vulnerable child protection. The government's primary role is reflected in legislation, policy development, and resource allocation, and social organisations are typically the primary operators of child protection practices. Social organisations leverage their strengths and characteristics to provide numerous forms of protection to vulnerable children. According to O'Kane's (2003) study, social organisations provide numerous forms of social protection, including housing, finding foster families, skill training, and moral and cultural education. Protection is provided in three primary ways: through child protection centres, on the streets, and in communities.

Ireland has had a single state- provided child protection and welfare service called the Child and Family Agency (Burns et al., 2024). Strydom et al. (2020) indicated a significant emphasis on statutory services and a lack of resources for family preservation efforts in South Africa.

2.2.2 In China

The scholars engaged in children's research have been exploring the concept of vulnerable children and the evolution of the study of vulnerable children. In the academic world, many scholars have analysed the development stages of the research on vulnerable children. Wang (2021) observes that since the turn of the twenty-first century, the number of academic papers on child social work has increased significantly, with a phased growth pattern and several small peaks in China.

2.2.2(a) The Research Trajectory for Vulnerable Children

Gao and Peng (2015) propose a three-stage evolutionary trajectory for children's unique research in difficulties. The first stage (1981- 1998) focuses on vulnerable children from non-social welfare. There are 136 related papers, but only one paper uses vulnerable children as the keyword in the paper. In the second stage (1999-2005), the services for vulnerable children were discussed and expanded from social welfare. Although the number of papers increased, 372 related articles were published, and only 18 articles were published with vulnerable children as the keyword. In the third stage (2006-2014), the concept of vulnerable children was deeply discussed in social welfare. In this stage, 3,144 related papers were published, and the number of papers focusing on vulnerable children increased to 296. The researcher states the fourth stage (2014-2020) of the research on vulnerable children. At this stage, they studied vulnerable children from the perspective of multiple fundamental theories. The researcher took vulnerable children as the main keyword to find the article on the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) website, and

the results showed that there were 1307 related kinds of literature, 855 of which took vulnerable children as the keyword. At this stage, theoretical research and practical research continue to deepen.

2.2.2(b) The Research Stage of Protecting Vulnerable Children

The model of relief and protection system for vulnerable children has experienced four critical stages in China: the government-led welfare guarantee for children, the prosperity of social charity in the Ming and Qing Dynasties and the Republic of China, the return of state responsibility in the field of child welfare after the founding of New China, and the formation of a new government-civilian cooperation framework after the “Lankao Fire Accident.” Du (2019) considers that China’s child protection system went through an unconscious system evolution stage before 1989. Since China signed the Convention on Child’s Rights in 1990, the child protection system has entered an embryonic stage. After nearly 20 years of development, China’s child protection system ushered in the “first year of child welfare” in 2010, and China’s child protection system has entered a stage of professional development. Specifically, from 2010 to 2014, China’s child protection system started a process of professionalisation; since 2014, the child protection system has entered into professional construction and development.

As a result, Chen and Dong (2017) believe that the rescue and protection system for vulnerable children in China has undergone a four-stage evolution. The four stages are, government-run private assistance; private government assistance; the

entire play of the subjective role of non-governmental organisations; and a new type of government-civilian cooperation in the rule of law.

Chen and Dong (2017) stated the protection of disadvantaged children has the following characteristics: the family is the main body raising children; the government is the leading and advocating force to protect the survival rights of disadvantaged children; the non-governmental charity organisation is the welfare and guarantee of poor children auxiliary provider of services.

The “Opinions of the State Council’s Leading Group for the Protection of Minors on Strengthening the Protection of Minors” was published in June 2021. It stated that it is necessary to vigorously develop professional social work and volunteer services to protect children (0- 18) and fully support the development of social workers devoted to child safety. Consider professional advantages such as resource connections, capacity building, psychological intervention, proper protection, legal services, social surveys, social observations, educational corrections, community corrections, and adoption evaluations. We actively guide volunteers in their efforts to safeguard children.

The Child’s rights, China’s child protection system, has been in its infancy. After nearly two decades, 2010 was the so-called “first year of child welfare” in the development of China’s child protection system. Since then, China’s child protection system has begun to mature professionally.