

Research on the Coordinated Development of Labor Health and Welfare Protection from a Public Policy Perspective

Yi Liu *

International Department, The Affiliated High School of South China Normal University,
Guangzhou 510630, China

* Corresponding Author Email: sunnyi_20202123@outlook.com

Abstract. Currently, China is in a critical period of economic restructuring and employment model transformation. The health needs of workers have expanded from traditional prevention of occupational diseases to various fields such as mental health and stress management. At the same time, welfare security is facing challenges such as difficulties in defining labor relations under the platform economy and insufficient adaptability of the security model. Within the existing policy framework, the health supervision led by the "Occupational Disease Prevention Law" and the welfare provision under the "Social Insurance Law" operate independently. Due to the lack of a cross-departmental coordination mechanism, health protection and welfare benefits have not been effectively integrated. Problems such as insufficient coverage of health services for new employment form workers, and uneven regional distribution of medical and rehabilitation resources have become increasingly prominent, restricting the effectiveness of labor rights protection and the advancement of the Healthy China strategy. From a public policy perspective, this paper systematically reviews the development history of China's labor health and welfare security policies and analyzes their core values in the coordinated development of the economy, society, and governance dimensions. Drawing on the practical experience of providing security for new employment forms and innovating trade union services, specific collaborative paths are proposed to provide policy references for deepening the integration of labor rights protection and the Healthy China strategy.

Keywords: Public policy; labor health; welfare protection; coordinated development; new employment forms

1. Introduction

The health and welfare protection of workers is an important part of the social security system, and its development level is closely related to the governance capacity of the country and the stage of social and economic development. Currently, China is transitioning from a high-speed growth stage to a high-quality development stage. The labor market is presenting new employment forms constantly emerging and increasingly complex labor relations. The demand of workers for health services has expanded from traditional occupational disease prevention to psychological adjustment and health management [1], while the demand for welfare has shifted from basic guarantees to flexible and personalized adaptation. Under the existing public policy framework, labor health policies and welfare protection policies belong to different governance domains. The lack of systematic and coordinated design in policy formulation and implementation hinders the full play of policy effects. From the perspective of public policy, examining the coordinated development of these two fields helps us track policy evolution patterns, clarify the value of coordination, and identify practical challenges. This, in turn, is conducive to building a scientific, reasonable, and feasible coordination mechanism. Such research is of great significance for improving the protection system of labor rights and interests, enhancing the effectiveness of public policy governance, and promoting the sustainable development of the economy and society [2, 3].

2. Development Trajectory of Labor Health and Welfare Protection from a Public Policy Perspective

China's labor health and welfare protection policies have evolved progressively alongside socioeconomic development, undergoing three distinct phases: foundation-laying, development, and deepening (Table 1). Coordination has strengthened progressively, while coverage and precision have continuously improved.

Table 1. Development Trajectory of Labor Health and Welfare Protection.

Dimension	Initial stage (Reform and Opening-up - early 21st century)	Development stage (early 21st century - the eve of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China)	During the deepening stage (since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China)
Core features	Establishment of the system, single breakthrough, and basic rights as a safety net	Institutional innovation and local exploration, with emphasis on the integration of the security system	System integration and precise policy implementation, focusing on the coordination of new business forms
Key policies / measures	1994's "Labor Law", 2001's "Law on the Prevention and Control of Occupational Diseases"	The Social Insurance Law in 2010; local pilot programs for medical insurance covering convalescence and recuperation; the linkage of "physical examination + subsidy" by trade unions	In 2021, the opinions on guaranteeing new business forms; the "ten measures" of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions; 7 provincial and municipal pilot programs for occupational injuries
Coverage scope	Mainly covering state-owned enterprise employees, excluding small and medium-sized enterprises and flexible employment groups	220 million people participated in work-related injury insurance, but there were still shortcomings in new business forms and small and medium-sized enterprises.	Covering 8 million new business form workers, extending to flexible employment

2.1. Foundational Stage

From the period of reform and opening up to the early 21st century, the initial stage was characterized by "the establishment of the institutional foundation and a breakthrough in singularity". During this period, policies mainly focused on establishing a guaranteed system for basic labor rights. The 1994 "Labor Law" established the framework for basic protection such as work injury and medical insurance, while the 2001 "Law on the Prevention and Control of Occupational Diseases" initiated the occupational health supervision system. During this period, a model of separate legislation for health affairs and decentralized implementation of welfare protection was formed. Influenced by the transition from a planned economy to a market economy, employees of state-owned enterprises became the main beneficiaries of these policies, while employees of small enterprises and flexible employment groups were often excluded. The welfare model was mainly based on enterprise-led physical distribution, and health services such as rehabilitation care were exclusively used by state-owned enterprises in high-risk industries. Policy coordination was largely spontaneous and lacked systematic top-level planning. This stage laid the legal foundation for subsequent development, although there were limitations in economic development at that time, which significantly restricted its coverage and depth.

2.2. Development Stage

During the rapid development period from the early 21st century to the eve of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China's labor health and welfare protection system was improved through parallel institutional innovations and practical explorations. Work injury insurance became a key breakthrough point, and the number of insured people soared directly to 220 million in

2020. This figure marked a shift in social security responsibility from enterprise-led to national coordination [4]. The 2010 "Social Insurance Law" integrated the medical and work injury insurance modules through a systematic approach, establishing the legal basis for coordinating health and welfare. Various innovative measures emerged in different regions: Economically developed coastal areas took the lead in piloting the inclusion of employee recuperation expenses in medical insurance payment scope, strengthening health maintenance through market-driven and public welfare models. The trade union system focused on "extensive health checks + targeted welfare subsidies", aiming to build a coordinated preventive health management and welfare protection system. However, during the development process, structural contradictions emerged: Policy resource allocation focused on post-event compensation, while neglecting front-end prevention. To date, departments have not established a standardized collaboration network, providing directions for subsequent policy optimization.

2.3. Deepening Stage

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China's labor health and welfare protection work has entered a stage of deepening coordination. Centered on "system integration and targeted measures", this stage actively responds to the challenges brought by new employment forms, shifting the policy orientation from the previously advocated "universal coverage" to more targeted and precise coordination. The 2021 multi-ministry joint document "Guiding Opinions on Protecting the Labor Rights of New Employment Form Workers" established the first institutional framework for coordinating health and welfare protection. The "Ten Measures" of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions innovatively combined rehabilitation services with cultural tourism consumption, achieving a synergistic effect of "health services + welfare provision". Pilot projects for occupational injury protection under new employment forms have covered 8 million people in seven provinces and municipalities, successfully filling the gaps in health protection and welfare benefits. The development of policy in this stage presents new characteristics: top-level design guidance, digital technology empowerment, and participation of multiple stakeholders. The Healthy China strategy has achieved deep integration with the social security system, elevating the traditional departmental collaboration coordination mechanism to a higher-level institutional integration level.

3. Significance of Their Synergistic Development from a Public Policy Perspective

In the context of rapid global economic and social development, labor health and welfare protection can to some extent serve as an indicator of a country's governance level. Improving the efficiency of public policy governance as the core task of national governance modernization is of great significance for the coordinated promotion of labor health and welfare protection. In the traditional governance model, labor health policies and welfare protection are respectively handled by different departments. Policy obstacles and information silos lead to fragmented policy formulation and low execution efficiency (Figure 1). The coordinated development of these two fields not only breaks the management boundaries between departments - achieving coordinated goals and contents in policy formulation and reducing conflicts and duplication, improving scientific accuracy—but also promotes cooperation between departments at the implementation level [5, 6]. This promotes information sharing and resource integration, avoids regulatory loopholes and implementation contradictions, and improves policy effectiveness. From another perspective, this collaborative approach shifts public policy governance from a single department-led model to a multi-stakeholder cooperation model, optimizes the governance system, and provides strong practical support for promoting national governance modernization.



Figure 1. Comparative Effectiveness of Traditional Single-Department Governance vs. Collaborative Governance Models

4. Existing Challenges in Coordinated Development from a Public Policy Perspective

4.1. Dispersed Policy Objectives

The coordinated development of public policies requires the construction of a clear and unified goal framework. However, at present, the existing labor health care and welfare protection policies of China are distributed in different kinds of administrative systems, which shows the dispersion of goals. The health policy places the emphasis on occupational health protection, emphasizing the protection of laborers' safety and health by means of risk monitoring, the prevention of occupational disease and the guarantee of the health service system [7]. The welfare policy, taking the economic security net as the center, adopts the social security system and the assistance program to solve the basic living minimum needs of the workers. This distribution of functions has different standing points, but the result is the contrary in the course of carrying out policy, because there is not the high-level coordination mechanism. There are also situations of overlapping responsibilities and coverage differences, resulting in redundant resource allocation and unnecessary administrative expenses for certain protection projects. For example, key areas such as protecting the rights of flexible workers and assessing health risks in emerging industries face regulatory gaps due to policy disconnection. Fundamentally, this situation arises from the lack of a cross-departmental coordination mechanism, so it is urgent to establish a unified goal system to eliminate policy obstacles.

4.2. Uneven Policy Coverage

The coverage of China's labor health and welfare policies varies significantly among different groups and regions, resulting in poor fairness. From the perspective of groups, these policies mainly target employees under traditional labor relations, and employees of state-owned enterprises can obtain relatively comprehensive health services and welfare guarantees. However, the needs of new employment forms, employees of small and medium-sized enterprises, and flexible workers have not been fully met. In new employment forms, due to issues in the recognition of labor relations [8], a minority of workers are difficult to be included in the traditional guaranteed system. Small and medium-sized enterprises, due to operational cost limitations, invest little in employee health and welfare protection. Flexible workers' protection patterns are inelastic and hence fail to achieve the required degree of participation. From the standpoint of the particular regions, the economic development of the eastern districts usually makes the rules pertaining to employment more stringent. They offer large varieties of health service resources, and higher welfare standards, rendering comparatively general protection to the workers. The economically backward central and western

districts, on the other hand, are running behind as a whole. Their resources are limited, resulting in a shortage of hospital and medical facilities, inefficiency in the working of regulations in regard to welfare, and restricted areas of the application of the policies. This inequality of extension is contrary to the fundamental canons of public policy espousing justice and adversely impacts the thorough protection of the workers' rights and privileges [9].

5. Pathways for Coordinated Development of Labor Health and Welfare Protection from a Public Policy Perspective

5.1. Establishing a Top-Level Coordination Mechanism

The protection of labor health and welfare is the most important symbol of social progress in today's social governing system. In order to achieve real results, the government should carefully collect and organize its plans and prepare their policy regulations so that work may be accomplished through the cooperative action of the two systems. The documents could well contain the intended aims, the guiding ideas, the specific work, which was planned, together with an indication of the way in which they were to co-operate from a strategic standpoint.

Of great value would be the organization of a committee of direction composed of representatives from all the departments concerned. This committee would advocate concerted action in making the large policy decisions and emphasize their adherence. Each department's duties would have to be specifically defined, to avoid any overlapping or uncertainty of responsibility. It would be of utility to hold regular meetings for the purpose of following up and measuring progress, discussing new problems and aiding in the maintenance of smooth procedure between departments.

In Nanguan district, Changchun city, Jilin province, for example, the local overall governance center has set up a set of mechanisms for the comprehensive cooperation between human resources, courts and judicial bodies. In the year 2024, the district took care of over 1900 labour disputes, through a fixed and invariant way of communication "1+N" symposiums, with a successful reconciliation of 92% of disputes. Analyzing existing laws concerning work-related health and welfare will likely clarify conflicts and fill gaps. By amending current legislation, the government can provide a stronger legal basis for this coordination work. The government will give by this solution a better strong legal basis for work of co-ordination by way of laws to be filled or changed or conflicts for the current of the system and new different employed. This last measure means that the cooperation between the various units can not only well work but also obtain legal protection for the efficacy of these coordinated efforts.

5.2. Strengthening Policy Implementation and Regulatory Coordination

In today's swiftly changing social and economic environment, workers are faced with serious problems such as increased incidents of occupational diseases and the limited protection given to labor by welfare measures. The effective working of policies depends, however, on stronger enforcement and supervision. To carry out policies, a joint enforcement team made up of members of departments concerned might be formed. This team would enforce joint policies with respect to labor health and welfare, enforcing uniformity of interpretation as well as actual enforcement of the policies and avoiding inconsistency in their application. A national information exchange center might also be established, by means of which information on labor health and welfare in respect to several departments might be coordinated and exchanged. This real time approach to exchange of information will secure greater accuracy and dependability with respect to the implementation of the policies. In respect to supervision, it is necessary to function in terms of common management standards of supervision. The standards of supervision must deal completely with the type of situation which calls for supervision, the manner of supervising it, etc. and who is responsible for this particular supervision. This system will avoid over or insufficient supervision. Consequently, all types of activity within the system work with maximum efficiency and the rights of the workers are completely

safeguarded. A cross departmental cooperative supervision system should be erected and joint supervisory action taken on a regular basis to supervise the implementing of the policies, quickly discover and remedy problems resulting in the implementing of the policies, and improve supervision feedback mechanisms [10]. The supervision results should be linked to policy adjustments and departmental evaluations to motivate cross-departmental cooperation and improve the effectiveness of supervision. The aforementioned coordinated implementation and oversight actions each contribute differently to policy effectiveness in practice. Quantitative analysis provides a more intuitive representation of the proportionate effectiveness across different dimensions. Figure 2.

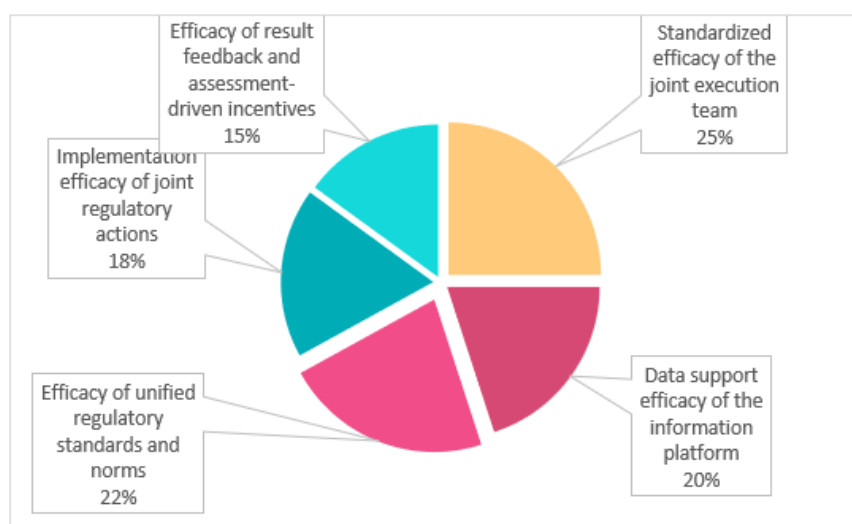


Figure 2. Data on the Coordinated Effectiveness of Policy Implementation and Oversight.

6. Conclusion

From the perspective of public policy, the coordinated development of labor health and welfare protection is an inevitable choice to meet the demands of economic and social development, improve the livelihood security system, and enhance the governance efficiency of public policies. By tracing the development trajectories of these two fields, it is clearly observable that policy practice has evolved from independent development to initial coordination, and then to deep coordination. Coordination has become the core direction of current policy development. Their coordinated development is of great significance at the economic, social and governance levels. However, the current policy practice still faces some challenges, such as scattered goals, low efficiency of interdepartmental coordination, and uneven coverage, which all limit the realization of the synergy effect. The proposed coordinated development path, including the construction of top-level mechanisms, the improvement of the content system, and the strengthening of implementation supervision, provides a direction for overcoming practical obstacles and promoting deeper coordination. These measures will provide more powerful support for advancing the "Healthy China" strategy, improving the social security system, and promoting high-quality economic and social development.

References

- [1] Rönnblad, T., Grönholm, E., Jonsson, J., Koranyi, I., Orellana, C., Kreshpaj, B., et al. (2019). Precarious employment and mental health: A systematic review and meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, 45(5), 429–443.
- [2] Muntaner, C. (2016). Global precarious employment and health inequalities: Working conditions, social class, or precariat? *Cadernos de Saúde Pública*, 32(6), e00162215.

- [3] Bosmans, K., Hardonk, S., De Cuyper, N., & Vanroelen, C. (2015). Explaining the relation between precarious employment and mental well-being: A qualitative study among temporary agency workers. *Work*, 53(2), 249–264.
- [4] Benach, J., & Muntaner, C. (2007). Precarious employment and health: Developing a research agenda. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 61(4), 276–277.
- [5] Bosmans, K., Lewchuk, W., De Cuyper, N., Hardonk, S., Van Aerden, K., & Vanroelen, C. (2017). The experience of employment strain and activation among temporary agency workers in Canada. *Society, Health & Vulnerability*, 8(1), 1306914.
- [6] Bodin, T., Çağlayan, Ç., Garde, A. H., Gnesi, M., Jonsson, J., Kiran, S., et al. (2020). Precarious employment in occupational health: An OMEGA-NET working group position paper. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, 46(3), 321–329.
- [7] Matilla-Santander, N., Muntaner, C., Kreshpaj, B., Gunn, V., Jonsson, J., Kokkinen, L., et al. (2022). Trajectories of precarious employment and the risk of myocardial infarction and stroke among middle-aged workers in Sweden: A register-based cohort study. *The Lancet Regional Health – Europe*, 15, 100314.
- [8] Kreshpaj, B., Orellana, C., Burström, B., Davis, L., Hemmingsson, T., Johansson, G., et al. (2020). What is precarious employment? A systematic review of definitions and operationalizations from quantitative and qualitative studies. *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*, 46(3), 235–247.
- [9] Chung, H. (2022). *The flexibility paradox: Why flexible working leads to (self-) exploitation*. Policy Press.
- [10] Piwowar-Sulej, K., & Bąk-Grabowska, D. (2020). Non-permanent employment and employees' health in the context of sustainable HRM with a focus on Poland. *Social Sciences*, 9(7), 117.