

Research on the Silver-Haired Digital Legal Framework Supporting Public Welfare Models in Universities

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ABSTRACT

Amid the convergence of digitalization and population aging, the number of elderly internet users has surged, leading to frequent incidents of online fraud and data breaches that infringe upon their digital rights. Existing legal services for seniors in this context suffer from shortcomings such as lack of professionalism, poor adaptability to elderly needs, fragmented approaches, and difficulty in sustained implementation, failing to meet their specific protection requirements. Building on the "Silver Hair Digital Legal Protection Initiative" and drawing on research and practical experience, this study explores pathways for university law clubs to collaborate with communities in delivering age-friendly digital legal services. It proposes establishing a comprehensive, age-specific legal service system encompassing preventive measures, mid-process consultation, and post-event rights protection, along with designing a sustainable operational mechanism featuring "public welfare benefits + low-cost value-added services + multi-party support." Research confirms that university participation offers distinct advantages in terms of expertise, cost efficiency, and feasibility, effectively addressing existing service gaps and enhancing elderly digital security. This study establishes a low-cost, easily scalable model for university-based public legal services, providing actionable guidance for grassroots efforts in safeguarding seniors' digital rights.

KEYWORDS: *Digital rights of the elderly; Protection; Public welfare model in universities.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The number of elderly internet users continues to grow, and online consumption and administrative services for seniors have become commonplace. However, new forms of digital fraud targeting the elderly, personal data breaches, and online shopping scams remain prevalent, while seniors generally lack effective channels for evidence collection and rights protection. Existing grassroots legal services for the elderly suffer from limitations such as monotonous formats, fragmented resources, and difficulties in sustained operation. Meanwhile, the government has consistently introduced policies on age-friendly infrastructure upgrades, senior rights protection, and digital legal system development at the grassroots level, with multiple supporting laws providing legislative support for safeguarding elderly digital rights—reflecting clear policy guidance and practical necessities. Current domestic and international research indicates that foreign

countries have mature legislation and community support systems for elderly digital security, though direct adaptation is constrained by structural differences. Domestic studies predominantly focus on macro-level institutional frameworks or isolated anti-fraud awareness campaigns, lacking comprehensive, university-academia-community collaborative solutions with long-term implementation potential, coupled with insufficient empirical data^{[1][2]}. Data on China's internet user base and elderly online behavior can be found in the CNNIC Annual Internet Development Report^[3], while theoretical frameworks for elderly studies should draw upon active aging theory^[4]. Based on this, this paper integrates literature analysis, community questionnaire surveys, and practical project experience to explore pathways for deep collaboration between university law clubs

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and communities, focusing on the genuine legal needs of the elderly population^[5]. It aims to establish a comprehensive, age-friendly legal service system covering pre-event prevention, in-process consultation, and post-event rights protection, while designing a sustainable operational mechanism that combines public welfare benefits, cost-effective value-added services, and multi-source financing. The study seeks to enrich theoretical research on digital rule of law and university-based public legal services, develop replicable grassroots service models, and alleviate the shortage of legal resources for the elderly^[6]. This research employs a combination of literature analysis, online questionnaire surveys, and field investigations. The online survey questionnaire was designed around five key dimensions: scenarios of impaired digital rights among the elderly, shortcomings in existing legal education services, public acceptance of university-based public welfare legal services, preferred formats of age-friendly services, and sustainable funding channels for project operations ("*Silver-Haired Digital Legal Protection Initiative Survey Plan and Questionnaire*"). Comprising 20 research questions, the questionnaire was distributed to elderly community residents, family members of seniors, and grassroots community staff, yielding 211 valid responses. Data analysis included statistical processing, proportion breakdowns, and identification of demand characteristics, providing a foundation for quantitative evaluation. Field research employed community visits and face-to-face interviews to engage directly with local officials and senior citizens, documenting practical governance challenges and genuine legal needs. By integrating quantitative survey data with firsthand interview insights, the study comprehensively analyzed real-world obstacles in protecting elderly digital rights and diverse legal demands, offering robust empirical evidence for developing university law clubs' collaborative community service models^[3]^[7].

II. Overview of the Current Status of Digital Rights Protection for Seniors

Currently, the provision of digital rights protection for elderly citizens in China primarily involves three types of service providers: The first category consists of centralized anti-fraud campaigns led by judicial and cyberspace administration authorities, utilizing offline lectures, poster displays, and short educational videos as primary tools. These efforts focus on early risk awareness but suffer from high content standardization and lack personalized

consultation channels addressing issues related to elderly consumption, financial management, or data privacy breaches. The second category includes basic legal consultations offered by grassroots judicial offices and community legal service centers, which rely on resident lawyers serving the public. However, limited staffing time and personnel availability make it challenging to sustain ongoing support at the community level throughout the entire rights protection process for seniors. The third category comprises periodic legal education volunteer activities organized by non-profit organizations, typically featuring short-term intensive sessions without follow-up mechanisms after events conclude, resulting in weak operational sustainability^[1].

Existing legal service models face multiple limitations: Legal education materials are overly technical and lack adaptation to the cognitive needs of elderly users; legal service resources are unevenly distributed, making it difficult for seniors in suburban areas and older communities to access these services; service providers operate independently, with risk prevention, dispute resolution, and infringement remedies functioning in isolation without forming a cohesive service ecosystem; most public welfare legal programs rely solely on short-term volunteers and temporary funding, lacking stable financial support for sustained provision of regular digital legal services for the elderly. Overall, current services only address certain surface-level risks and fail to comprehensively meet seniors' protection and rights protection needs across diverse scenarios such as online transactions, social interactions, and digital governance. The challenge of inadequate recourse mechanisms for seniors facing digital asset or personal information violations remains significant^[6].

III. Research Methods and Result Analysis

1. Research Methods

This study comprehensively employs three research methods, combined with an integrated online-offline survey approach to collect primary data, as detailed below:

First, the literature analysis method. This approach systematically reviews laws and regulations such as the "*Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly*" and the "*Personal Information Protection Law*", national aging policy documents, domestic and international publications on elderly digital rights, core journal articles on university-provided public legal services, and reports

on grassroots legal practice. It identifies existing research gaps and policy foundations to establish the theoretical framework for this study.

Second, the online questionnaire survey method. A standardized questionnaire was designed around five core research dimensions and distributed to elderly residents in the community, their family members, and grassroots community staff to quantitatively collect participants' genuine views and preferences regarding infringements of elderly digital rights, existing legal education services, and university-based public legal services, thereby forming a quantitative analysis sample.

Third, the field interview research method. Conduct on-site visits to elderly communities and suburban neighborhoods, carrying out one-on-one interviews with seniors, community grid workers, and grassroots staff to document challenges in addressing daily issues related to digital fraud and information leakage disputes. This approach compensates for the limitations of questionnaire data in capturing subjective concerns and practical governance bottlenecks, thereby achieving mutual validation between quantitative data and qualitative interview findings.

2. Analysis of Research Results

A total of 260 online questionnaires were distributed, with 211 returned. After excluding invalid responses and duplicate entries, the valid samples remained.

A total of 211 questionnaires were collected, yielding a valid response rate of 81.15%. The questionnaire comprised 20 questions covering five key dimensions: the current status of elderly digital rights protection, existing gaps in legal education, preferences for age-friendly services, acceptance of public legal services in universities, and sustainable funding channels for long-term operations. Based on the statistical results and visualized charts, the core findings are as follows.

1. The level of public attention regarding the digital rights of elderly individuals

Distribution Table of Public Concern Regarding the Impact on Elderly Individuals' Digital Rights

Do you regularly pay attention to rights issues faced by elderly people in digital life (such as online fraud and data breaches)? [Single-choice question]

Option	Subtotal	Proportion
Follow regularly	72	34.12%
Follow occasionally	98	46.45%
Low attention	33	15.64%
Never followed	8	3.79%
Number of valid responses to this question	211	

Table 1

As shown in Table 1, 34.12% of respondents regularly pay attention to issues regarding the infringement of elderly individuals' digital rights, while 46.45% do so occasionally; together, these groups account for 80.57%. Only 15.64% rarely pay attention, and 3.79% have never done so. This indicates that the vast majority of the public is aware of real-world challenges faced by the elderly, such as online fraud and information leakage, highlighting widespread public concern about protecting their digital rights.

2. The Infringement of Elderly Individuals' Digital Rights Is Widespread.

Statistical Table on Cases Where Elderly Individuals Around Interviewees Have Experienced Violations of Their Digital Rights Have your elders (such as parents or grandparents) ever experienced rights violations in the digital realm (e.g., automatic renewals, fraudulent investment scams)? [Single-choice question]

Option	Subtotal	Proportion
Encountered multiple times	24	11.37%
Occasionally encountered	75	35.55%
I've never experienced this, but I've heard of similar situations.	78	36.97%
I've never encountered it, nor have I heard of it.	34	16.11%
Number of valid responses to this question	211	

Table 2

According to Table 2, only 16.11% of respondents reported that their elderly relatives had never experienced or heard of incidents involving violations of digital rights; 11.37% stated that their elderly relatives had encountered such infringements multiple times, 35.55% occasionally experienced them, and 36.97% had not personally suffered from them but were aware of similar cases. Nearly half of the respondents reported having personally experienced infringements of digital rights, and over 80% had encountered related victim cases, demonstrating that the infringement of elderly individuals' digital assets and personal information has become a widespread phenomenon at the grassroots level.

3. Key Conclusions Derived from the Research Investigation:

First, the difficulty in obtaining evidence remains the primary obstacle for elderly individuals seeking to protect their rights. All surveyed groups consistently identified the complex procedures for retaining and retrieving electronic evidence as the most challenging aspect of the rights protection process.

Secondly, personal information leakage is the most pressing digital rights issue facing the elderly today, followed by online pension scams and hidden pitfalls in online consumption.

Third, there are distinct differences in the needs across various age groups: younger elderly individuals prefer one-on-one mobile phone operation training, while community staff and elderly children urgently require regular professional legal assistance; existing phased and generalized legal education programs fail to meet these stratified needs.

IV. Analysis of Practical Challenges and Needs in Protecting Elderly Digital Rights

1. Current Status of Digital Life Risks Among the Elderly

Based on online survey data, nearly half of the surveyed elderly have experienced varying degrees of digital rights violations in their daily online activities, with the most common issues falling into three categories: illegal leakage of personal information, digital pension scams, and hidden traps in online purchases^[7]. Platform pop-ups frequently prompt users to provide sensitive details such as ID numbers, phone numbers, and home addresses; deceptive practices include false rebate promises in health product live streams and WeChat groups for elderly investment schemes, automatic renewal of short-video subscriptions, and bundled low-cost travel packages. Scam tactics continue to evolve, becoming increasingly sophisticated and concealed.

The survey also revealed the widespread existence of hidden victimization cases, with most elderly individuals choosing not to report violations of their rights. On one hand, they fear being blamed by their children for trusting online information, which creates psychological burdens; on the other

hand, they consider the involved amounts to be low, the reporting process cumbersome, and the likelihood of recovering property minimal, leading them to abandon seeking redress^[8]. The limitations in elderly individuals' ability to protect their rights manifest in three key aspects: first, limited legal awareness makes it difficult to distinguish between infringements committed by platforms and operators; second, weak awareness of electronic evidence preservation—they lack knowledge on how to retain materials such as chat records, transfer receipts, or live streaming screenshots, complicating proof of infringement; third, insufficient familiarity with complaint channels like 12315, 12348, and online reporting systems, coupled with complex procedures that diminish their willingness to seek recourse, coupled with the fact that minor financial losses often go unaddressed, has led to a continuous accumulation of infringement issues^[6].

2. Shortcomings in the Current Service Supply

The current provision of digital legal services for the elderly population suffers from structural deficiencies, failing to adequately address their genuine needs for protection and rights enforcement. Conventional community legal education approaches remain rigid, predominantly relying on traditional methods such as posting promotional posters or holding offline meetings to read legal provisions. These materials are often broad and general in content, lacking tailored explanations addressing prevalent digital risks like short-video consumption, online elderly financial management, and telecom-based fraudulent activities. Moreover, the technical language used is often complex and difficult for older adults to comprehend^[9].

Various public legal awareness campaigns for social welfare purposes exhibit distinct temporal characteristics, being conducted exclusively as single events during Anti-Fraud Awareness Day or other senior-friendly occasions. Upon conclusion, these activities lack sustained follow-up mechanisms or support systems, making it difficult to address new challenges faced by elderly individuals subsequently. The fee structures for legal services provided by market-oriented law firms are excessively high,

exceeding the financial capacity of average seniors, while demand for paid online consultations regarding minor property disputes remains low. Official public legal service centers are predominantly located in urban core areas, leaving elderly residents in old neighborhoods and suburban areas with significant travel difficulties due to long commutes, thereby limiting the reach of door-to-door legal services^[1].

Each service provider operates independently, with insufficient coordination among risk prevention, dispute consultation, and infringement relief procedures. The entire process from elderly individuals encountering risks to seeking legal assistance lacks coherent professional support^[9], while the fragmentation of assistance channels after disputes occurs remains a significant issue^[10].

3. Characteristics of the Needs of the Target Population

According to relevant survey data, the younger elderly demographic is a high-frequency internet user group that regularly watches short videos, conducts online shopping and medical appointments, participates in live-stream interactions, demonstrates strong learning capacity and a keen willingness to use the internet independently. They are particularly vulnerable to scams related to elderly financial management, live-streamed product sales, and fraudulent health supplement purchases^[8]. Compared to group lectures, they prefer age-friendly legal education formats such as one-on-one practical training sessions with on-site mobile guidance. [9]

Family members of elderly individuals also have significant needs for legal services. Younger children, constrained by demanding work schedules, are unable to consistently monitor their parents' online activities. While possessing basic anti-fraud awareness, they lack systematic legal knowledge, struggle to recognize emerging fraud tactics, and are unfamiliar with procedures for assisting elders in protecting their rights when rights are violated. There is thus a demand for accessible anti-fraud resources and educational materials on rights protection, which can help establish a family-level safeguard mechanism^[7].

From the perspective of community governance, elderly individuals falling victim to online fraud often trigger family conflicts and neighborhood disputes. Community grid officers and grassroots staff lack professional legal expertise; when addressing various online infringement claims from seniors, they can only provide simple guidance

rather than offering compliant and effective solutions. This has created sustained pressure in resolving digital disputes involving the elderly, making it imperative to establish dedicated legal teams for long-term, systematic legal assistance programs. Such initiatives would alleviate burdens on grassroots governance and align with the overarching strategies for aging-related work in the new era.

V. Characteristics and Operational Mechanisms of the Silver-Haired Digital Rule of Law Protection Program Model

1. Core Characteristics of the Public Welfare Model in University Law Education

The university-based legal public welfare initiative primarily serves law students and is overseen by legal faculty members, distinguishing it from commercial law firms or short-term volunteer programs. Its distinctive features include: First, a strong professional focus with comprehensive knowledge of civil and commercial law, cybersecurity legislation, and the *"Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly"*^[1], enabling precise analysis of legal disputes related to digital consumption and telecom fraud; Second, a non-profit, inclusive nature—basic legal services are provided free of charge, while personalized services requiring higher staffing costs incur minimal fees, with no commercial profit motives^[5]; Third, organizational sustainability through a steady stream of volunteers supplied by law schools, supported by year-round rotation systems and training programs for new members, ensuring continuous operation without gaps after event completion; Fourth, seamless resource integration, allowing collaboration with local judicial offices, communities, and civil affairs departments for official guidance and venue support, all while maintaining low operational costs within academic settings.

2. The Core Advantages of Addressing the Aforementioned Practical Challenges

Addressing the key challenges identified in Part III—high incidence of digital risks among the elderly, insufficient existing service provision, and difficulties in meeting the legal needs of diverse groups—the university-based public welfare model offers unique and irreplaceable solutions.

First, address the challenges of legal education being unsuitable for older adults and containing fragmented content. Given that students are more familiar with new digital fraud scenarios such as

short videos, live streams, and online financial schemes, materials like comics, large-print manuals, and mobile-based instructional guides tailored to elderly learners' cognitive patterns can be developed. This approach compensates for the legal expertise gaps among community staff and delivers targeted, accessible anti-fraud legal education^[9].

Second, addressing the gap in sustained services. Unlike one-off public welfare campaigns during festivals, the semester-based system and annual rotation mechanism at universities enable communities to establish fixed weekly presence sites, creating a closed-loop follow-up process covering pre-event, during-event, and post-event phases. This addresses the shortcoming of public welfare activities being short-lived initiatives^[11], and establishes a replicable, regularized model for university-local collaboration services^[10].

Third, balance the cost of legal services with the financial capacity of elderly individuals. Basic consultations and evidence guidance are entirely free, while low-cost value-added services are significantly priced below standard law firm fees, aligning with the limited spending capacity of older adults.

Fourth, alleviating pressure on grassroots governance. By maintaining resident student teams, communities can consistently handle digital dispute resolution for elderly residents while simultaneously providing legal education to their children and community grid workers, thereby addressing the diverse needs of multiple stakeholders at different levels^[7].

Fifth, cost-effective implementation advantage. By utilizing university classrooms for volunteer training, only basic materials and transportation expenses are required, with minimal funding sufficient to sustain year-round operations, thereby lowering the project's entry threshold.

VI. Conclusion

The digital transformation continues to permeate the daily lives of elderly populations, making the protection of their digital rights a pivotal issue intertwined with grassroots governance, aging-related welfare initiatives, and the development of a digital legal framework^[7]. Current traditional legal education services, characterized by fragmentation, short-term focus, and lack of adaptability for older adults, fail to meet their evolving needs for online risk prevention and rights protection. In contrast, the "Silver Hair Digital Legal Protection Program"

established through university law schools leverages professional student teams, community-based platforms, comprehensive legal services, and diversified funding mechanisms. This initiative transcends the limitations of single-offer public awareness campaigns, pioneering a low-cost, sustainable, and replicable approach to age-friendly legal education programs^{[5][10]}.

This model establishes a comprehensive safeguard system for the elderly, encompassing risk prevention, real-time consultation, and full-process rights protection, effectively addressing their practical concerns regarding online fraud risks and difficulties in seeking legal redress, thereby strengthening grassroots digital security defenses for seniors^[7]. Additionally, it provides a practical platform for legal education in universities, enabling young law students to uphold their commitment to the rule of law through grassroots service activities, achieving mutual benefits between social welfare initiatives and legal talent development^[6], while enriching the educational approaches for community volunteer services among law students^[8].

In the future, as online fraud tactics continue to evolve and digital living scenarios for the elderly become increasingly diverse, efforts to protect their digital rights must be continuously refined. Law schools across universities can adapt this model to local community characteristics, strengthen regular collaboration with judicial offices, communities, civil affairs departments, and non-profit organizations, regularly update legal education content and service processes tailored to emerging digital risks, and address gaps in age-friendly public legal services at the grassroots level. By leveraging young legal professionals from universities to engage at the grassroots level, we can enhance the digital legal protection network for seniors, fostering synergy between active aging, digital accessibility for older adults, and modernization of grassroots legal services—ensuring older adults enjoy a safer and more secure online experience in the digital era^[6].

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