

The Influence of Parental Migration on Left-behind Children's Development in China

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Abstract. Both the number of migrant workers and the number of kids being left behind have substantially increased since the programme was opened up. This study attempts to show how parental migration affects children who are left behind and explore the causes of such negative effects. It turns out that when parents move away, it has a variety of repercussions on the children who are left behind, including their emotional health, academic performance, level of cooperation, and cognitive development. Governments must play a crucial role towards enhancing the living conditions for children who have been left behind in rural areas. This includes providing more opportunities for migrant workers to reunite with their families, providing greater opportunities and time for parents to watch their children, and emphasising relative caring policies in teachers' daily lesson plans. Rural families also have to change their mindset for degrees, and giving more expectations of their children's learning.

Keywords: Parental migration, Left-behind children, China.

1. Introduction

People from rural areas have been migrating to metropolitan areas in search of employment prospects ever since China's social economy underwent a dramatic expansion. Numerous youngsters are left behind as a result of this widespread issue in various rural areas of the nation. Children who have one or both of their parents leave their hometown and move, often for at least six months, to an urban region for employment are referred to as "left-behind children" (LBC) [1, 2]. The lack of parenting causes problems for left-behind children in several aspects, from mental health, cognitive level, and cooperation level, to school performance. Although currently there are some policies focused on providing more opportunities for LBCs to get on with non-left-behind children, there are no strong, clear incentives for the relevant authorities to implement.

This research aims to find the various influence of parental migration on those children who have been left behind in rural areas, from the health aspect, school performance aspect, cooperation aspect and cognitive aspect. It then gives some brief suggestions to the governments, the country, and each family.

Although there is a lot of research associated with left-behind children, few of them focus on comparing the cognitive level of left-behind children to non-left-behind children, being influenced by their migrant parents. Also, the instructions for local are not explicit enough to follow. This research focuses on Chinese left-behind children in rural areas and gives more systematic information about how to improve the situation of left-behind children. Giving more approachable advice to the governments, the country and each family in need.

2. The Influence of Parental Migration on Left-behind Children's Development in China

2.1. Background Information

As one of the "three left-behind groups (left-behind elderly; left-behind children; left-behind women)" in rural areas, left-behind children are the phased problems brought about by modernization, urbanization and economic development since China's reform and opening up. In terms of this issue,

from 2016 to 2022, the government has published “Opinions on strengthening the care and protection work of Rural left-behind children”, “Opinions on further improving the care and service system of rural left-behind children and children in difficulties”, “Notice on organizing and carrying out the policy promotion and protection of rural left-behind children and children in difficulties and notice on further addition [3-5]”. Also, those documents have all pointed out that all sectors of society need to strengthen the attention to the ideological status and mental health problems of left-behind children, policies are still inaccurate and unstraightforward for all sectors to follow, which means the policies are too general. Furthermore, a recent study found that China has 61 million unaccounted-for children, with more than one-third of them being under the age of 17 [6]. Given the staggering number of LBCs, it is not unexpected that extensive research has been done on their health and behavioral issues.

2.2. Definition

2.2.1 LBC

Left-behind children, also called LBC, are a group of children who have been left in rural areas and taken care of by their siblings, relatives, or grandparents other than their parents. The age of LBC is below 18 years old. Their parents' migration to other towns or nations lasted at least six months.

2.2.2 Parental Migration

Parental migration happens in a high frequency if the family is in rural areas, and in order to feed the whole family, people in their working-age (always the parents), have to leave their family and migrant to urban areas seeking better job opportunities.

2.3. Impact on Children

2.3.1 On Health Aspect

On the one hand, when it comes to mental health, being left behind can severely increase the feeling of self-longlines among children in rural areas. According to a recent study, left-behind children's sense of self-loneliness is 1.4 times that of children who is not left-behind, and the possibility of the former having social avoidance is twice that of the latter one.

Children who were left behind had higher levels of social avoidance and self-loneliness, respectively, than children who were not left behind.

The parent's decision to leave their kids in rural areas might also have a variety of effects on their mental health. Moms' migratory work has a bigger influence on the social and emotional health of children who are left behind than fathers do. Mothers' migrant job has an essential effect on left-behind children's self-isolation and social avoidance, but fathers' migrant labour just has a negative impact on this behaviour.

In terms of age difference, the social psychology of left-behind children has a change process from internalization to externalization: The younger the left-behind children are, the more alone they feel; the older they are, the more likely they are to avoid interactions with others.

Parents' migrant work has a negative impact on the social psychology of left-behind boys and left-behind girls, and the negative impact on girls is greater [7].

On the other hand, LBC's physical health condition can also be affected by their parental migration. Based on longitudinal data from the China Health and Nutrition Survey, Yuing Tong, Weixiang Luo, and Martin Piotrowski investigated the relationship between parent migration and the health of children left behind [8]. They discovered that parental migration is 29% more favorably connected with childhood illness than it is with children who are not left behind. But there is one circumstance—maternal migration—that won't have a negative impact on LBC's state of health.

2.3.2 On School Performance Aspect

Due to the lack of spare time for migrant parents to spend, seldom do they have the time to take a role in family education, most of the work is done by LBC's other guardian, not to mention the problems their children have in school. Some migrant parents thought it is the school's entirely

responsibility to teach their children how to get good grades, so they do not care much about how to help their children find the solution. Instead, they scold them or punish them physically in order to let them know the consequence of not doing well in school, which only do harm to children's learning process and their mental health [9].

2.3.3 On Cooperation Level Aspect

Compared to non-left-behind children, left-behind children not only have less opportunity to get taught but also get less care from their parents in the interpersonal skills aspect. Thus, their cooperation skills cultivate much slower and have more obstacles when learning it [10].

2.3.4 On Cognitive Level Aspect

According to Y Zhou, TC Yang, who did research based on empirical test, compared non-left-behind children and left-behind children's cognitive ability [11]. They found that being left-behind has the most severe impact on children's cognitive level, and the impact is negative. The reason sat behind it might be parental migration cause children who have been left-behind receive fewer opportunities being caring and nursing, which leads to the shortage of them to grow an equivalent level of cognitive ability to those non-left-behind children.

Additionally, the preschool cognitive growth of children who are left behind is significantly and primarily negatively impacted by parental relocation [12].

2.4. Reason Behind Those Impacts

2.4.1 Parents' Cognitive of Study

Higher parental aspirations have been linked to better academic performance [13]. Some of the left-behind children's parents consider study as useless and purely a waste of time. They value a job position much more than a study opportunity, which is due to the economic shortage condition in their families. Additionally, seldom are their parents really care much about their children's grade, not to mention the trouble LBCs facing in school, which in term leads to the passive learning attitude of LBC themselves. Since they cannot learn positively, there is less chance for them to perform well in academics compared to those non-left-behind children [9].

Moreover, since the lack of parents' nursing and caring, it is difficult for LBCs to cultivate self-discipline on their own. Instead of regulations, LBC prefer a free-living style that is not under their parent's control, which might be the reason for getting used to living by themselves when their parents are far away from home.

2.4.2 From Government Aspect

"Opinions of the Ministry of Education and other five departments on strengthening the care and education of rural left-behind children in the compulsory education stage" has been established and given some suggestions to the government and society [14]. However, those suggestions are not detailed enough to follow. For example, in the article, it says that: To assist LBCs in living a better life, society should become involved and encourage people from all walks of life to participate in caring for left-behind children and carrying out various forms of care activities, establish a three-dimensional care service network for the entire society, and gradually form a long-term mechanism to promote the healthy growth of left-behind children. The instruction is not explicit; nonetheless, in order to push every sector, it must be simple enough to obey.

Also, the article says: Schools should place focus on mental health education for left-behind students and incorporate it as a key component in their lesson plans in order to strengthen this program. It is critical to encourage left-behind children to participate actively in athletics, the arts, social practise, and other activities in order to alleviate their loneliness and establish a campus culture that prioritises left-behind pupils. But in this part of the suggestion, there is no instruction on how to add LBC's mental health education into teaching plans. It also says that: In all aspects of school work, people should pay attention to ways and methods to avoid labeling left-behind children. But the fact is, teachers nowadays always label children and categorize them in order to make the management

more easily, so it is hard to change teachers' behavior habits by only giving implicit suggestions. Instead, positive reinforcement should be noticed by teachers when they give care to the LBCs during daily teaching.

3. Conclusion

The family especially left-behind children's parents have to change their attitudes towards children's school performance, and get rid of the opinion of "a better job is valued more than a degree." In addition, schools can strengthen the companionship with families and cooperate together to improve living conditions for left-behind children. Both society and schools should improve family education guidance services for parents and guardians of left-behind children in order to increase their awareness and ability to perform a good job with family education.

The government ought to take a vital role in improving the circumstance for left-behind children. By giving more detailed instructions to locals. On the one hand, incorporate work to assist left-behind children into the overall planning of local economic and social development and social management innovation system, based on regional environmental characteristics, economic and social conditions, distribution of left-behind children and work progress, overall planning, classified guidance, and actively explore and practise to form an effective care and service model for left-behind children. On the other side, the authorities ought to boost the incentive and punishment mechanisms to speed up the process of assisting individuals left behind in improving their living situations.

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