

Causes And Countermeasures of Psychological Problems of Left-Behind Children in Rural China

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Abstract. Rural left-behind children are rural children who grow up unaccompanied by their parents because both parents go out for work all year round. Lack of parental care and companionship of left-behind children, there are universal psychological problems. Based on the theory of personality development stage and existing literature, this paper studies the status quo of left-behind children's psychological problems and analyzes the social causes of the problems. The long-term absence of parents, the overindulgence or alienation of the alternate parents, the orientation of improper evaluation in traditional school education, the bad cultural customs in rural areas and the lack of social attention are all the reasons for the psychological problems of left-behind children. Developing the rural economy and achieving local employment can prevent children from being left behind. Measures such as improving the parenting experience of migrant workers, adhering to the educational orientation of quality education, and promoting boarding schools in rural areas can effectively solve the psychological problems of left-behind children and promote educational equity.

Keywords: Psychological problems; left-behind children; educational equity.

1. Introduction

In 2015, left-behind children aged 0-17 exceeded 28 million, and the number is increasing year by year [1]. The problem of "left-behind children" arises because they are unable to take their children with them due to the point-based school admission policy and the household registration system. Due to the lack of parents' companionship and care, many left-behind children suffer from psychological problems. The Chinese Academy of Sciences conducted a nationwide survey of left-behind children and concluded that 34 percent of left-behind children in rural areas are suicidal, and more than 9 percent of them have attempted suicide. A survey in a north China showed that left-behind children account for 20 percent of juvenile crimes [2].

Erikson, a representative of the "New Psychoanalytic school", proposed the theory of "the division of personality development stages", arguing that a person's life have eight consecutive and different stages. Each stage has its own specific development tasks. Whether the "development task" is completed successfully or not, there will be two extreme differences between successful and unsuccessful "personality qualities", which become "positive" or "negative" personality qualities. Close to the success end, the formation of positive personality quality; Close to the unsuccessful end, the formation of negative personality qualities [3]. The psychological problems of left-behind children can be interpreted by the theory of dividing the stages of personality development.

In the early infant period (0-1.5 years old), children with trust and mental health will be positive and optimistic and full of curiosity; If the basic trust is not established, it will form a timid fear, lack of security, and a sense of trust. At this stage, children are the loneliest and weak, so they depend on their parents the most, especially in need of more affection from their mothers. Due to the lack of parents' companionship and care during this critical period of growth, left-behind children generally have the problem of emotional hunger, loneliness, selfishness and self-isolation, and it is difficult to express their true thoughts to the outside world [4].

The developmental task in the later stages of infancy (1.5-3 years old) is to gain "a sense of autonomy". That is, to take the initiative to implement their own ideas, to actively persist when encountering difficulties, and to exercise good will quality. Children in this period, if there is no encouragement from parents, later will show a lack of willpower. Many left-behind children are

inattentive and have low learning efficiency. They have little interest in learning and poor academic performance. Psychological loneliness, missing parents and other emotions affect study, and cannot self-regulate [4].

In childhood (7-12 years old), that is, in primary school, the developmental task is to gain "confidence" and overcome "feelings of inferiority". Left-behind children have a feeling of being abandoned due to a long-term parental love shortage. Due to the lack of early family education and poor personal willpower, most left-behind children have poor GPA and are difficult to win the recognition of teachers and classmates. This further aggravates the sense of inferiority [4].

Adolescence (ages 12-18) is a standardized period for adolescents in their pursuit of identity in terms of gender, occupation, beliefs, ideals, etc. If the crisis at this stage is successfully addressed, the virtues of honesty and loyalty develop; If the crisis is not successfully resolved, a lack of belonging, apathy, and a lack of caring will develop. Only then can the personality be developed soundly. This stage is the key period of the child's personality development, but also the early stage of individual role socialization, especially need parents' attention and school instruction. Due to the absence of parents and the inadequacy of traditional education, many left-behind children resent their parents and envy their classmates, showing rebelliousness, puppy love, strong aggression and even illegal behaviors [4].

The lack of parental care, the lack of intergenerational education, the defects of traditional school education and some traditional bad habits in rural areas all greatly affect the growth of children's character, resulting in irreparable character defects. The unfortunate people often need a lifetime to heal their childhood. When these children grow up, they will go to the city to work. The impact of psychological problems is far more than one person and one family. This paper aims to analyze the social factors of these negative factors, explore the deep logic of the formation of these factors, and put forward targeted policy suggestions and solutions. All social problems are historical problems, which involve multiple factors.

2. Analysis of the Social Root Causes of Children's Psychological Problems

2.1. Lack of Parental Companionship

Lack of parental companionship is the primary factor causing psychological problems for left-behind children. Why do parents of left-behind children have to go out to work? Why do two people work at the same time? Because working alone is not enough to improve your life. The ratio of per capita disposable income of urban and rural residents in 2021 will be 2.50 (income of rural residents =1), and the Gini coefficient will be 0.48. The rural-urban gap is about three times larger, and the gap between high-income and low-income industries is about four times larger [5]. The main reason for migrant workers to work in cities is to increase their income. Their children became left-behind children.

Why do the parents of left-behind children have no time to go home? In 2022, the total number of migrant workers in China will be 295.62 million, of which 171.9 million are migrant workers far from homeland [6]. The highest per capita monthly income of migrant workers is in the transportation and construction industry. Workers in the transportation industry need to travel by day and night for several days or even ten days, and the construction industry cannot go home all year round. According to the survey, it is common for migrant workers to meet children 3 times a year and only once every 2 years; 29 percent of left-behind children have not received a phone call from their parents for more than a month. Rural workers generally work overtime and overwork for years, and their legal welfare is not guaranteed.

Why can't you bring your children close to you? Migrant workers in cities suffer from working overtime, leaving them little time or energy to take care of their children outside of work. The wages of migrant workers are comparatively lower than those of urban workers, and it is hard to guarantee benefits such as social security, medical insurance and paid holidays. Their salary is not enough to support a family's expenses in the city. The existing household registration system does not support

the children of migrant workers to study in urban schools, and even if children getting admission, the high fees are beyond the parents' ability to pay. Schools for the children of migrant workers in cities are largely privately run. Due to limited funds, the teaching quality is much worse than that of urban public schools, and even worse than that of rural public schools.

In fact, the parents of left-behind children also lack parenting experience and knowledge, and subjectively ignore the psychological needs of children. Men account for 63 percent of farmers, while women make up 36 percent. The average age of migrant workers is 42.3 years old. Among migrant workers, 14.1 percent have only a primary education and 55.2 percent have a secondary education [7]. In other words, nearly 70% of the migrant workers have not received high school education or above and lack communication skills with their children.

Parents of left-behind children have two puzzles about communication with their children: one is that it is not useful, and the other is that they do not know what to talk about with their children. Because they have been away from home for so long, most parents only talk about three things: Have they eaten yet? How are you studying? Did you do well in your exams? And this third question hardly creates a pleasant conversation atmosphere. Many parents feel that they have worked hard to struggle outside, but their children do not study hard, it is sure to scold. Many parents, themselves are not good at controlling emotions. Because when they are working during the day, they are also very anxious. Today they are scolded by the boss, tomorrow they are bullied by the workers, there is a wave of anger in the heart, it is easy to vent the negative emotions to the children, and finally produce negative communication.

2.2. The Problem of "Separated Generation Education"

80% of left-behind children are raised by their grandparents, 13% are entrusted to relatives and friends, and even 7% are unsupervised [8]. Most of the grandparents' guardians, who are old and of low cultural quality, are farmers and have no working experience or social experience, so they are basically unable to tutor and supervise their children's study. This way of intergenerational guardianship, although the parents who go out are more assured, there are many drawbacks. First, the custodian is too tolerant and permissive in the way of discipline, focusing on material and life satisfaction but less moral constraints and will quality shaping, which is easy to develop children's wayward psychological behaviors [9]. Second, the grandparents are older and have more traditional ideas, and most of them do not have urban work experience and life experience, so it is difficult to gain the recognition of left-behind children. The third is the parental guardianship, that is, the guardianship mode raised by relatives such as the parents' peers. Because the object of guardianship is not his own child, the guardian cannot balance well leniency and gentleness, and is often negligent in strict management. For emotionally vulnerable children, it is easy to produce the feeling of being a guest, thus forming an afraid, solitary, introverted character. Fourth, after the parents of left-behind children leave, the guardians are more frugal in life, and the children's nutrition is poor, which cannot meet the needs of children's growth and development. Children cannot get timely and effective treatment when they are sick, can only take some simple, traditional methods of treatment, or simply hard "carry". Fifth, left-behind children have to undertake all kinds of housework at an early age, and even do intensive farm work. The burden beyond age affects children's physical and mental health.

Research shows that 43.8 percent of left-behind children have little or no emotional communication with their guardians, 37 percent of left-behind children have a tendency to autism, and 30 percent of left-behind children often feel lonely [8].

2.3. The Challenge of Rural School Education

Rural education is underfunded. China's fiscal expenditure on education accounts for 4% of GDP, compared with 5.4% in the United States (2010) [10] and an average of 4.9% in OCED (2020) [11]. The average rural student spent 3,633.56 yuan in the general public budget, an increase of 39.64% over 2012, significantly lower than the national average growth rate (55.42%). In 2020, the proportion

of rural primary schools with campus networks will be 67.3%, 17.2 percentage points lower than that of urban schools [12].

Due to the absence of parents and the alienation of generations, family socialization has been replaced by schools, and the socialization function of parents has been mostly transferred to teachers. The school's improper evaluation is an important reason for the psychological problems of "left-behind children". The traditional education system is exam-oriented education. Schools evaluate teachers and students according to their scores. Students are divided into good and bad students simply by their scores. Teachers devote their limited energy to those students who are good in academic performance and obedient, while those who are poor in academic foundation and disobedient are mostly ignored and allowed to develop. Most of these students are "left-behind children". Because they cannot get the attention and trust of teachers, they will be depressed, pessimistic, tired of learning and rebellious, and fight with teachers in a "bad" and "more disobedient" way. And their rebellion aggravates teachers' rejection of these students, which leads to the deterioration of teacher-student relationship in this vicious circle.

The average salary level of primary and secondary school teachers is low, and there is no extra income in addition to salary. Rural students who graduate from normal colleges are unwilling to return to the countryside to engage in basic education, and high-level teachers are unwilling to stay in the countryside. Teachers in private rural schools do not have the establishment, they cannot receive equal pay for equal work, and their basic salary is not guaranteed. Teachers also lack systematic training, multimedia teaching equipment and content resources, and traditional subject education cannot satisfy children's thirst for knowledge. There is a lack of communication between teachers and parents and left-behind children do not receive special and effective education and care.

Children cannot get care at home, cannot get warm at school, it is easy to have psychological problems. Left-behind children have the phenomenon of weariness, truancy and dropping out of school. According to the research conducted by the Population and Development Research Center of Renmin University of China, the school enrollment rate of left-behind children has dropped significantly after entering junior high school, and 12% of the students choose to drop out [13].

2.4. Bad Cultural Traditions in Rural Areas

The working parents' wrong concept of study affects their children. Parents who "work" to earn more money instilled in their children the idea that "reading is useless", and did not actively guide and motivate their children's studies. There is a widespread concept among children that "if they can study, they can also earn money if they cannot study well" [14]. And parents with low income, negative attitude towards life, instilling fatalism to their children, thinking that the fate is bad, complaining all day, irresponsible to their children, neglect to care. Son preference still exists in some areas, and girls are neglected or even discriminated against by their parents. The wrong educational concept seriously affects the normal learning and healthy growth of left-behind children.

The lack of grassroots cultural organizations, there is no socialized ideological education institutions. Children are not guided to establish a correct world outlook. Common vices such as gambling, smoking and drinking in rural areas affect children's worldview. Children are seriously addicted to mobile phones; the situation is very serious. A research report shows that 40 percent of left-behind children have their own mobile phones, and half use their elders' phones. 67.3% of parents believe that their children are addicted to mobile phones [15]. There are many kinds of TV programs, but without parents' supervision and proper guidance, children gradually fall in love with some violent and bloody movies and have a wrong understanding of criminal acts on TV [16]. Some left-behind children also engage in bad social behaviors, such as stealing, fighting and robbery.

2.5. Lack of Social Attention

Migrant workers are vulnerable groups and often face problems such as asking for wages. Children far away in the countryside are even more neglected. Social charities are underdeveloped. Support for children in rural areas has high input and low output.

3. Suggestion

To achieve no longer staying behind is to truly achieve local employment of migrant workers, so that they do not have to go out anymore. First, we should vigorously develop the e-commerce of agricultural products and increase agricultural income through specialty agriculture and online direct selling. Second, to develop local economy and create more local job opportunities by attracting investment and undertaking industrial transfer from coastal areas; Third, increase investment in rural infrastructure and develop green industries. Such investment must give priority to local employment. As incomes rise, migrant workers can return to work locally and reunite their families.

We should improve the conditions and facilitate rural children to enter schools in cities with their parents and provide similar condition as urban children for their physical and mental health. First - and second-tier cities should set specific improvement targets and increase financial input to ensure the implementation of the plan. The municipal governments of the national base areas will invest and provide matching special funds.

Legislation establishes paid annual leave for migrant workers and guarantees that migrant workers can have at least 10 days of paid leave each year to reunite with their children. Local governments and enterprises provide convenient transportation and financial support for left-behind children to go to cities regularly every year to reunite with their parents.

The parenting experience of migrant parents has been improved, and manuals to communicate with children have been established, teaching these parents how to communicate with their children by phone and satisfy their emotional requirements. Psychologists will be invited to provide online counseling for parents and teach them how to communicate with their children.

Adjust educational resources and insist on quality-oriented education. We will promote the establishment of boarding schools for senior primary schools in areas with inconvenient transportation and mountainous areas [17], and merge schools with fewer students into larger schools with boarding as the main system. China will establish a national network and multimedia education resource center for rural children, make the core content of compulsory education and extracurricular content multi-media and network, and establish a multimedia library in every rural school to ensure that students in rural areas have full and convenient access to these high-quality resources. The teaching goal of compulsory education should be adjusted, emphasizing quality education and adding mental health education courses for students. Rural teachers' incomes should be raised and their vocational training strengthened.

We will seek support from social forces. Due to the lack of psychological care and correct guidance in behavior for those children, volunteers around the school or in the village can spontaneously form a volunteer team to help left-behind children in their daily life and study by using their strengths. The government guides social resources to provide these non-governmental organizations with knowledge, skills and equipment support. The closer the voluntary organizations are to the left-behind children, the better it will be for their healthy growth. According to Durkheim, left-behind children will feel the care from voluntary organizations, feel an inseparable emotional bond with them, and feel the warmth of home, thus reducing their chances of making mistakes and strengthening self-supervision.

Zhang Xuemei, secretary-general of the Minors Protection Professional Committee of the National Bar Association, analyzed that the protection of left-behind children still lacks pertinence and comprehensiveness, and relevant laws, regulations and policies lag behind and are not operable. It is urgent to establish a perfect legal protection system for left-behind children. It is suggested to speed up the revision and formulation of inappropriate laws, regulations and policies, such as the household registration legal system and education policies. The principle of gender equality and children first should be effectively incorporated into the formulation and revision of laws and regulations and policies, with special attention to the educational rights, personal rights and property rights of rural left-behind children, eliminating discrimination against rural children, enhancing the timeliness and operability of regulations and policies, and effectively guaranteeing the implementation of these provisions.

4. Conclusion

According to the theory of stages of personality development, children need to face psychological challenges in each stage of growth, and psychological problems will be formed if they cannot overcome psychological crisis. In infancy, the role of parents is decisive, and in childhood and adolescence, parents and schools play a role together. Therefore, for the healthy growth of children, parents and children cannot be separated for a long time during the period of infants and young children, neither can they be left behind. Therefore, on the one hand, we should develop local economy to promote local employment, and on the other hand, provide convenience for children to follow their parents. In order to solve the psychological problems of children and teenagers, we must increase the investment in rural schools, adhere to the orientation of quality education, and adhere to the principle of educational equity. Let left-behind children be respected, valued and happy at school. The improvement of social problems needs the government's attention, planning, guidance and investment. To realize social equity, we must first realize educational equity.

Left-behind children should enjoy the same happy childhood and bright future as their urban counterparts. Give the child who is lonely in heart the power of love, give the child a strong hug, give the child continuous attention, so that the child can have a happy childhood, because a happy person uses childhood to heal a lifetime.

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