Influence of Parenting Styles on Problematic Behaviours of Migrant Children

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Abstract. The living environment of migrant children changes dramatically when they settle in cities with their parents. If migrant children do not adapt well to the new environment, they may develop psychological deviations and internalised problematic behaviours. Research has shown that poor parenting styles increase the incidence of children's psychological problems and easily trigger problematic behaviours in migrant children. This study explores four aspects of the relationship between parenting styles and migrant children's internalised and externalised problems, the effects of different parenting styles on migrant children's internalised and externalised problems, and further illustrates the mediating roles of migrant children's self-esteem, parent-child relationship, and social support between the two. It was found that positive parenting styles were negatively related to the problematic behaviours of migrant children, while negative parenting styles increased the occurrence of migrant children's internalisation problems; negative parenting styles increased the likelihood of migrant children's externalisation problems, while positive parenting styles could, to a certain extent, stifle the emergence of the aforementioned externalisation problems. Therefore, schools and society should pay attention to the correct guidance of parents' communication and expression styles, and at the same time pay attention to the establishment of a warm atmosphere and a pleasant communication process in the family, so as to reduce the internalisation problems of migrant children. In addition, if migrant children have externalisation problems, parents, schools and society should help them to set up good behavioural models and provide them with timely and correct guidance.

Keywords: Parenting styles, migrant children, problematic behaviours.

1. Introduction

In this study, migrant children are defined as children under the age of 18 who live with their parents or other guardians in the place of migration for more than half a year [1]. The study shows that as the study of migrant children from different perspectives deepens, migrant children gradually reveal psychological problems such as loneliness, low self-esteem and learning difficulties. These problems can lead to migrant children showing more behavioural problems such as social withdrawal, aggression and disciplinary problems compared to local children [2].

Parenting style refers to the methods and forms of upbringing and education usually used by parents in dealing with their children, and is a characteristic summary of various parenting behaviours of parents [3]. It has been shown that poor parenting styles increase the incidence of children's psychological problems and tend to trigger problematic behaviours in migrant children [4].

Studies on parenting styles and children's problematic behaviours, as well as the influence of parenting styles on children's problematic behaviours have been discussed in detail, but there are fewer studies on migrant children and most of them are empirical studies. This paper analyzes the current situation of migrant children's problematic behaviours, the influence of parenting styles on migrant children's problematic behaviours, and the mediating and regulating mechanisms, with the expectation that it will provide a reference for reducing or eliminating migrant children's problematic behaviours, and promoting the healthy development of migrant children.

2. Analysis of The Current Situation of Problematic Behaviour among Migrant Children

2.1. Demographic Characteristics of Migrant Children

Migrant children are children aged 18 years or younger who have lived with their parents or other guardians in the place of migration for more than half a year. As shown in table 1, data is calculated from the microdata of the 2020 national census, which shows that the size of China's migrant children in 2020 will be 71.09 million, accounting for approximately one quarter (23.86 percent) of the total number of children in China.

Table 1. Status of children of the migrant population in China in 2020 [1]

(a person's) age		0 1 2	3 4 5	6 7 8 9 10 11	12 13 14	15 16 17	
point		Early infant development	pre- school education	Primary level	Junior high school	Senior secondary level	Total 0-17 years
Number of persons (10,000)	All children	4164	5279	10874	5021	4427	296766
	Migrant children	808	1147	2321	1043	1791	7109
	Children left behind in rural areas	713	780	1590	672	421	4177
	Children left behind in cities and towns	454	496	935	385	246	2516

The group of migrant children covers infants and toddlers, preschool, primary school, middle school and high school. The largest number of migrant children, 23.21 million, are in primary school. This may be due to the fact that some migrant families choose to return to their hukou ("hometowns") to sit for examinations for reasons such as the midterm and college entrance exams, which are not required for the primary and junior high school exams. This is why the largest number of migrant children are at the primary level.

2.2. Problematic Behaviours Faced by Children on The Move

According to Achenbach's definition of problematic behaviours in children, they are differentiated into two categories: internalizing problematic behaviours and externalizing problems. Internalizing problem behaviours are mainly emotional problems such as anxiety, depression and isolation, while externalizing problem behaviours are mainly behavioural problems such as aggression and defiance, disciplinary transgressions and hyperactivity [5].

Compared with urban children, the migrant children group has more internalised and externalised problems. Yu found that problematic behaviours, such as lying, stealing, disobeying school rules, and fighting were significantly higher among migrant children than among non-migrant children [6]. According to the results of the abbreviated version of the Child Behaviour Scale compiled by Achenbach and revised by Xin Ziqiang, the self-reported rates of problematic behaviours among migrant children reached 31.0% and 21.0%, respectively [7]. It was found that migrant children were more likely to experience a sense of discrimination, more pronounced anxiety, greater loneliness, and higher detection rates of deviant behaviours, and depression was a common problem among the migrant children group [8]. Other studies have also found that migrant children exhibit psychological and problematic behaviours such as a strong sense of discrimination, obsessive-compulsive phenomena, emotional instability, low self-esteem, anxiety, loneliness, depression, insecurity, learning anxiety, social maladjustment, hostility, and mental imbalance [9]. Through many studies on the problematic behaviours of migrant children, it can be found that the problematic behaviours of migrant children have their own characteristics: the internalized problematic behaviours of migrant children are mainly manifested in the aspects of anxiety and depression, learning efficacy, and social integration; and the intrinsic problematic behaviours of migrant children are more prominent than the extrinsic problematic behaviours.

3. Analysis of The Impact of Parenting Styles on the Problematic Behaviour of Migrant Children

3.1. Definition and Categorisation of EMBU-Based Parenting Styles

Parenting styles are a combination of parenting concepts, parenting behaviours and their emotional expressions towards children. The Parenting Styles Questionnaire (Egna Min-nen Beträffende Uppfostran, or EMBU) developed by Perris et al. is one of the most commonly used instruments to measure parenting styles [10]. The standard version of the EMBU asks subjects to recall the ways in which their fathers and mothers treated them when they were growing up, including the four dimensions of Rejection, Emotional Warmth, Over-protection, and Favoring Subject. The revised Chinese version of the EMBU is divided into a father's version and a mother's version: the father's version includes "Emotional Warmth, Understanding", "Over-protection", "Punishment, Harshness", "Rejection, denial", "overprotection", and "favouritism"; the mother's version includes six dimensions: emotional warmth, understanding, overprotection, and over-protection. The short-form parenting style questionnaire (s-EMBU) was revised by Jiang [11]. The revised s-EMBU consists of 21 questions, including the dimensions of "rejection", "emotional warmth" and "overprotection". The revised Chinese version of the s-EMBU has greatly reduced the number of questions, has good reliability and validity, and has been widely used in China. Therefore, this study used the s-EMBU scale to define and classify parenting styles.

3.2. General Situation Analysis of Parenting Styles and Problematic Behaviour of Migrant Children

3.2.1 Relationship between Parenting Styles and Migrant Children's Internalisation Problems

Through previous studies, it was found that positive parenting styles including: warmth and understanding, acceptance, support, recognition and guidance are negatively associated with migrant children's problematic behaviours, reduce their internalised problems, and have a protective effect on their problematic behaviours, while negative parenting styles such as: harshness, punishment, and over-interference increase the occurrence of migrant children's internalised problems [12].

Due to work and cultural constraints, parents care less about their migrant children and tend to be simpler and rougher, which is unfavourable to the healthy development of migrant children's mental health. Most of the literature research results show that parents take too much protection for their children, easy to promote the children's attachment to their parents and limit their ability to adapt to society, excessive interference, harsh and punitive attitudes and so on easy to make the children produce resistance, hurt the children's self-esteem, which will make the children appear withdrawn, timid, active, depression and other symptoms, increasing the possibility of the emergence of psychological problems and behaviours [13]. Parents of migrant children should use more warm and encouraging ways when treating their children and try to avoid punishment, rejection and denial, which may make migrant children's hearts healthier, thus reducing or avoiding the emergence of some emotional problems.

3.2.2 Impact of Different Parenting Styles on Migrant Children's Internalisation Problems

It has been shown that migrant children with problematic behaviours scored significantly lower on the Emotional Warmth and Understanding factor of the EMBU survey than migrant children with non-problematic behaviours, and scored significantly higher on each of the other negative factors than migrant children with non-problematic behaviours [14].

According to Chang,in mental health status, migrant children's mean scores on the obsessive-compulsive symptom dimension, the anxiety symptom dimension, the learning stress dimension, and the emotional imbalance dimension were greater than 2, with 2.06, 2.08, 2.10, and 2.09, respectively, suggesting that there were mild mental health problems [15]. Bai et al. showed that the fathers' punitive, harsh, and over-interfering, and the mothers' over-interfering, over-protective, rejecting, denying, punishing, and harsh scores were significantly higher than those of non-problematic migrant

boys in the case of problematic migrant boys; and the mothers' emotional warmth and understanding scores were lower in the case of problematic migrant girls than in the case of non-problematic migrant girls. Fu et al. found that parental emotional warmth and maternal favouritism were negatively correlated with migrant children's depression, while paternal overprotection, maternal punishment/severity, and parental rejection/denial were positively correlated with migrant children's anxiety. Compared with urban children, migrant children scored significantly higher in total anxiety score, total depression score, somatisation/panic, separation anxiety and social phobia, suggesting significant internalisation problems. In terms of parenting styles, migrant children scored significantly lower than urban children on the factors of parental emotional warmth and maternal favouritism. Probably due to the younger age of migrant children, the emotional support of mothers may be more important to migrant children [16].

As the economic conditions of migrant children's families are often poor, their parents are busy working in the city to earn money to support their families, and they are very likely to neglect the education, care and concern for migrant children, which makes migrant children in the process of adapting to unfamiliar environments often suffer from internalised problems such as anxiety, depression and so on. These internalisation problems are manifested by the fact that migrant children are more likely to have somatisation symptoms of physical discomfort, are unwilling to be separated from their parents, are afraid of interacting with others, and hope to receive more parental care and to feel more emotional warmth.

3.2.3 Relationship between Parenting Styles and Externalizing Problems of Migrant Children

Different parenting styles have an impact on the externalising problems of migrant children. Especially for the aggressive behaviour of migrant children, the effects produced by different parenting styles are more obvious and profound. Therefore, children raised by bad parenting styles with good parenting styles aggressive behaviour is higher. Harsh, punitive and overly intrusive parenting styles tend to make children rebellious and imitate their parents' words and actions. The child learns and reinforces the aggressive behaviour and thus enters a vicious circle. Over-protection also makes children become bullies, bully their peers and develop aggressive behaviour. In conclusion, good parenting styles have a curbing effect on migrant children's aggressive behaviours, while unreasonable parenting styles are more likely to lead to the externalisation of migrant children's aggressive behaviours. When parents adopt the parenting style of emotional warmth and understanding, the likelihood of migrant children's behavioural problems such as social withdrawal is lower. If there is a lack of proper care and parents are used to paying too much attention to or even interfering with their children, the children are more likely to show the tendency of externalising problems such as withdrawal, avoidance, and poor interactions. Therefore, social withdrawal, an externalising problem, is closely related to parenting styles. A Spanish study found that poor parenting styles and parental intoxication were associated with alcoholism among migrant children. Alcoholism among migrant children is not only a reflection of imitating their parents, but also a reflection of family upbringing. Fu et al. found that migrant children with Internet addiction were less likely to receive understanding, support and warmth from their fathers. The father's parenting style was rough, punitive, and rejecting, and the migrant children's legitimate behaviours and demands were less likely to be recognised and met by their fathers, and the mothers shared similar inappropriate parenting styles with their fathers.

3.2.4 Effects of Different Parenting Styles on Migrant Children's Externalising Problems

According to the latest S-EMBU scale classification, Duan et al. found that the lack of a warm family, poor family parenting styles, and the lack of clear behavioural guidance and activity supervision for migrant children may contribute to migrant children's externalising behaviours later in life. Parenting styles were significantly correlated ($P<0.05$) with aggressive behaviours in all dimensions except for no significant correlation ($P>0.05$) between father-favoured subjects and mother-favoured subjects and aggressive behaviours and their dimensions. Analysis of the surveyed questionnaires using regression method indicated that the father factors Punishment and Harshness.

Rejection and Denial, and Overprotection positively and jointly predicted the aggressive behaviour of migrant children. Similarly, maternal parenting styles of rejection and denial, punishment and severity, and over-interference and protection positively and jointly predicted children's aggressive behaviour [17] Hu et al. studied migrant children's social withdrawal externalisation problems, found that the emotional warmth and understanding factor of parenting styles scale also scored significantly higher than the high subgroup, while the refusal and denial of parenting styles and punitive and harsh parenting styles factor scored significantly lower than the high subgroup [18]. A related study in Spain found that poor parenting and parental intoxication were associated with alcoholism in migrant children. Over-interfering, permissive and negligent parenting styles were associated with a 1.50, 2.51 and 2.82 times increase in the prevalence of alcoholism and parental intoxication in migrant children and a 1.99 times increase [19]. For Internet addiction, an externalised behaviour, the questionnaire found that the four-factor scores of poor interaction, indiscipline, hostility and aggression were significantly higher in the study group of migrant children than in the control group [20]. It was found that both parents of children with internet addiction have problems of over-discipline, over-punishment, denial, understanding and support for their children. This tends to make the child form an uncaring and lack of empathy indifferent character. Generally children with internet addiction have a withdrawn and cold personality. Internet addiction is also about escaping from reality and from parental rejection and excessive interference.

4. Mediation Mechanism

Frequent relocation brings many challenges to children on the move, with far-reaching effects on their emotions and behaviours. Among them, self-esteem, parent-child relationship and social support play a mediating role in parenting styles and problematic behaviours of migrant children.

Self-esteem is an individual's evaluation and perception of self-worth. Li pointed out that self-esteem partially mediated between mother's warmth and migrant children's internalised problematic behaviours in migrant children's self-reports, and fully mediated between parental encouragement of independence and migrant children's internalised problematic behaviours; self-esteem partially mediated between mother's encouragement of independence and migrant children's internalised problematic behaviours in teachers' appraisals, and fully mediated in fathers' independence encouragement and migrant children's internalised problem behaviour [13].

Parent-child relationship is an important environment for children's growth, and a stable and supportive parent-child relationship is an important safeguard for migrant children's problem behaviour. Qian pointed out that parenting styles could play a direct role in migrant children's problematic behaviours, and can also indirectly affect migrant children's problematic behaviours through parent-child relationships, i.e., parent-child relationships mediate the relationship between parenting styles and migrant children's problematic behaviours [21] Social support provides emotional support from peers, teachers, community members, etc., which can help migrant children alleviate the loneliness and uneasiness that comes with adapting to a new environment. Fan et al. pointed out that negative parenting styles (rejection, overprotection) have a direct negative effect on problematic behaviours and an indirect negative effect through social support. Positive parenting styles (emotional warmth) have an indirect positive effect on problematic behaviours through social support.[22].

In summary, stable self-esteem, supportive parent-child relationship and good social support and parenting styles play a positive and positive role in migrant children's problem behaviour. Therefore, families, schools and communities should work together to provide a good environment for migrant children to ensure their healthy development.

5. Conclusion

This study found that positive parenting styles were negatively related to migrant children's problem behaviours, while negative parenting styles increase the occurrence of migrant children's internalised problems; negative parenting styles make it more likely that migrant children will develop externalised problems, and positive parenting styles can, to a certain extent, stifle the emergence of the above externalised problems. In addition, self-esteem, parent-child relationship and social support may play a mediating role in parenting styles and problematic behaviours of migrant children. Therefore, schools and society should focus on the correct guidance of parents' communication and expression styles, avoiding simple and violent responses, and focusing on the establishment of a warm family atmosphere and a pleasant communication process in order to reduce migrant children's internalised problems. In addition, if migrant children have externalised problems such as smoking, drinking, fighting, etc., parents, schools and society should help them to set up good behavioural models and provide them with timely and correct guidance.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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