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Study on Social Work Intervention in Social Integration of Migrant Children

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Abstract: With the rapid economic development of China, large-scale population migration has become a normalized feature of population development. Under such circumstances, the social integration of migrant children has become a hot topic in the academic world. Migrant children are a special group generated in the urbanization process in China. Facing the new culture, order, and social environment, migrant children need to adjust their original way of life and adapt to a new life and study in the place of influx. As we all known, children are in the key stage of physical and mental development and socialization. They will face many difficulties in integrating into the new environment, due to their weak adaptive ability. Therefore, this paper analyzes the current situation of migrant children and comes up some strategies to help the migrant children under the guidance of ecosystem theory.

Keywords: Ecosystem Theory; Social Work; Migrant Children.

1. Formulation of the Problem

The comprehensive advancement of reform and opening-up and urbanization has led to an influx of surplus rural labour into the cities, and social transformation has promoted population mobility. Since the 1990s, the income of farmers working outside the home has increased considerably compared with those remaining in the countryside, improving family life to some extent, so that the mobility of the population in the new period in China has turned into family migration of the rural population. According to the seventh population census, China's mobile population reached 376 million. And according to the Blue Book "China Migrant Children Education Development Report 2021-2022", the scale of migrant children in China has reached 71.09 million, accounting for 23.9% of the total number of children [1]. It is about twice the size of migrant children in 2010. Migrant children are a unique group that emerged in the process of urban-rural integration construction in China. With the expectation of a better life in the city, they go from the countryside to the relatively economically developed cities together with their parents. However, due to the constraints of household registration, family economy, and other factors, migrant children face many difficulties in urban life. Urban migrant children face different dilemmas in the process of adapting to urban life, and they have various problems in education, psychology, physiology, and socialization levels. Therefore, it is of great significance to discuss the social adaptation of urban migrant children.

2. Definition of Core Concepts

2.1. Ecosystem Theory

In ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner argues that individuals are nested within a series of interacting environmental systems in which the systems interact with and influence their development. In other words, a person's development is influenced by the social organization, institutions, and cultural context in which he or she lives, and the development of children and adolescents is the result of a combination of biological and environmental factors [2]. The ecosystem theory model proposed by Bronfenbrenner defines the environment in which humans live and their interactions as behavioral systems. This theory divides behavioral systems into four levels: microsystems, mesosystems, exterior system, and macrosystems. These levels are differentiated according to the directness of their influence on children's development, with the degree of influence gradually shifting from direct to indirect from microsystems to macrosystems [3].

First, microsystems are central in the environmental hierarchy and encompass the environments in which individuals are directly involved and interact with each other, which are characterized by dynamic change and development, such as family and peer relationships. Second, mesosystems involve the interactions and connections between different microsystems, for example, patterns of interaction between siblings may have an effect on an individual's interactions with classmates. Further, exterior system includes those environmental factors in which children are not directly involved but which have an impact on their development, such as their parents' workplace. Finally, the macrosystem encompasses cultures, subcultures, and social environments that span the first three levels and that have a profound impact on children's development. Together, these levels form a complex system of behaviors that interact to shape children's growth and development. Therefore, to understand the individual better, social workers must place the individual in the context of the environment in which he or she is growing up, adopt an ecosystem perspective, and conduct a multifaceted systematic analysis of the problem. In practice, they should adopt a positive attitude and look for opportunities for change and growth in unfavorable environments.

2.2. Children of Migrants

Migrant children are also referred to as "children of migrants", "children of the migrant population" and "children of migrant workers". The Interim Measures on Schooling for Migrant Children and Youth issued by the State Education Commission and the Ministry of Public Security defines migrant children as children between the ages of 6 and 14 (or between the ages of 7 and 15) who follow their parents or

guardians to urban areas live there for half a year or more, and have the ability to study. In this study, migrant children are defined as children aged 6 to 14 years who have left their parents or guardians' hukou location to live in the city for half a year or more and attend school, and whose hukou is not located there.

2.3. Social Integration

The concept of social integration can be traced back to the concept of social cohesion, which refers to the process by which individuals or groups of people penetrate into each other, merge, and ultimately integrate into a common cultural life [4]. Cameron Crawford points out that social integration consists of two levels, macro and micro, in which one can gain equal attention and care at the social, political, economic, and cultural levels through the community; and in which one can build mutual trust and appreciation and respect for interpersonal relationships with family members, friends, and community members at the micro level. At the macro level, they can be valued and cared for equally at the social, political, economic, and cultural levels through the community; and at the micro level, they can establish interpersonal relationships with family members, friends, and community members with mutual trust, appreciation, and respect [5].

3. The Current Situation of Social Integration of Migrant Children

3.1. Microsystems: Problems Generated by Children Because of Mobility

It takes time for any person to adapt to a new environment, and migrant children have difficulties in adapting to their environment due to frequent mobility and the impact of different cultures. Social exclusion and parental neglect make them feel insecure in their psychological acceptance of the city. Migrant children are prone to psychological adjustment disorders in adapting to new living and learning environments, which are manifested in anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, and the other problems, which further impede their social integration, and some studies have shown that the degree of social integration of migrant children is significantly lower than that of other children [6]. School is a small social group, mobile children in communication with others, often because they come from the countryside and feel inferior, fear, avoidance, with "urban phobia", unwilling to take the initiative to open their hearts, often alone, with a strong sense of maladjustment in their hearts, traumatized, which leads to undesirable behavior.

3.2. Mesosystems: Trouble Arising within the Family

The greatest influence on migrant children comes first of all from within their families, whose economic and cultural levels are relatively low, and whose occupations are mostly high-intensity, high-risk, long-duration jobs that are not very stable. Therefore, under various uncertainties, it is impossible to create a good and superior learning and living environment and growth atmosphere for them, and this kind of "disorderly family life" makes it difficult for migrant children to build a stable social support system. Parents are busy with their work most of the time, lacking communication with their children and providing insufficient care and support to their children, which, together with being in an unfamiliar environment, prompts them to develop negative emotions, a sense of inferiority, and a rebellious mentality, which in turn gives rise to problems of interpersonal communication and social adaptation.

3.3. Exterior System: Issues Arising from Changes in Schools

Migrant children are at a critical stage of psychological and behavioral development, and they are to a certain extent vulnerable to external influences such as school and society. A comprehensive analysis reveals that the problems arising from migrant children's adaptation to school are mainly in the following areas: first, behavioral ability. Migrant children need to constantly adapt to different learning environments due to frequent changes in parental jobs and multiple school transfers. On the whole, most of the migrant children's behavioral adaptation is relatively good, but there are also some undesirable behaviors.

3.4. Macrosystems: Problems Arising from Insufficient Policy Convergence

The household registration system is a key factor in determining the successful integration of migrant children into society, and it constitutes an invisible institutional barrier. Under the dual urban/rural household registration system, migrant children are often categorized as "non-urban households", a status that makes it challenging for them to realize their basic rights and interests, such as education, health care, and social security. Because of the strong link between urban household registration and social welfare, migrant children often have difficulty enjoying the same public services as urban children, which further exacerbates their difficulties in integrating into urban life. In addition, differences in household registration status affect the acceptance and identification of urban residents with migrant children, which not only hinders migrant children's identification with the city, but also has an impact on their social integration process. Thus, the household registration system is not only an administrative division; it also profoundly affects the social status of migrant children and their degree of integration into urban society.

4. Social Work Interventions for the Social Integration of Migrant Children

The resources available to children on the move include personal, family, school, community, and other social organization resources. However, they may lack appropriate access to these potential information resources. Based on the operating principles of close connection, mutual influence, and organic interaction within the ecological environment system, it is necessary to adopt a holistic construction perspective at the four levels of micro-system, meso-system, exterior system, and macro-system, and to actively explore and realize the cooperation and orderly operation of the ecological environment system of children on the move, to create an environment that can be utilized for the healthy growth of mobile mental health.

4.1. Microsystems: Carrying out Social Case Work

Through carrying out social case work, activities, and the development of projects on the social integration of migrant children, to enhance their effectiveness factors, explore their

strengths, and improved their interpersonal skills. Focus on psychological adjustment, such as their self-confidence in integrating into the city. Encouraging migrant children to take an active part in collective activities, mobilizing their initiative to integrate into the city, and forming a fixed group of people to whom they can confide their concerns can reduce their psychological pressure.

4.2. Mesosystems: Conducting Group Work

Through group work, program activities with continuity and homogeneity are carried out for the service recipients with interactive games, situational simulation, cognitive discrimination, and in combination with professional social work skills and approaches, to achieve the promotion of the service recipients' ability to integrate into the society. Social workers play the roles of educators and negotiators, and can be a complement to psychological group counseling to synchronize the needs of each member.

4.3. Exterior System: Strengthening School Social Work

Schools play a central role in the socialization process of migrant children, yet the cultural differences between urban and rural areas often pose challenges to their adaptation. In order to alleviate these adaptation difficulties, it is particularly important to strengthen school social work. Social workers can provide migrant children with a variety of services, including academic support and psychological counseling, by being stationed in schools to facilitate their better adaptation to the school environment. Teachers should, on the one hand, show care and understanding for migrant youths, and on the other hand, teach local students to respect and help them. In addition, social workers should also assist schools in implementing cultural integration education to promote interaction between migrant children and local students, so as to build up an inclusive and friendly school atmosphere. In the face of learning obstacles and psychological problems that migrant children may encounter, social workers can carry out case consultations and group activities. Through these professional school social work interventions, they can help migrant children overcome cultural differences and integrate smoothly into school life.

4.4. Macrosystems: Providing Institutional Safeguards

Starting with top-level design, provide better institutional guarantees for the social integration of migrant children. It is necessary to break down the dualistic and segregated social system, strengthen the integration of the system, and gradually open up the urban public welfare system to migrant children. At the same time, the Government should recognize and respect the cultural differences of migrant children when formulating relevant policies. While promoting the material integration of this group, it should also promote cultural integration in accordance with their diversity. Second, improve the urban community support system. Urban communities should focus on the dissemination and construction of public spiritual culture in the process of promoting their construction. Urban community management departments should strengthen the ideological education of urban residents, focus on humanistic care, and actively promote the acceptance and tolerance of migrant children by urban residents. At the same time, community cultural infrastructure should be strengthened, such as libraries and cultural and sports activity rooms, in order to enrich children's spare-time cultural life and improve their comprehensive quality.

5. Conclusion

With the acceleration of urbanization, more and more people are flocking to cities in search of a better life. As a vulnerable group among the migrant population, the social integration of migrant children is a matter of great concern to society. To summarize, the social integration of migrant children is a dynamic process, which requires systematic measures and comprehensive management at multiple levels, including institutional, cultural, social, and psychological. As independent individuals, children do not have enough power for self-protection and are at a disadvantage in fighting for their rights. Child development is a call for social awareness and social responsibility. Based on the current situation of migrant children in China, this paper introduces the current situations of migrant children and intervenes from the ecosystem theory with the professional concepts and methods of social work in order to realize the harmonious integration of migrant children and urban society.

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