

A Study based on Strategies to Enhance the Subjective Well-Being of Rural Left-Behind Children

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Abstract: With the rapid socio-economic development and urbanisation, the problem of left-behind children in rural areas is becoming more and more prominent. This study uses a questionnaire survey to gain an in-depth understanding of left-behind children's family structure, education, relationship with parents, mental health level and emotional needs. Based on these findings, a series of strategies are proposed, including the provision of life guidance and learning resources, strengthening the organisation of group activities in communities and schools, fostering emotional ties between guardians and left-behind children, and increasing the efforts of mental health education. These strategies aim to focus on the inner world of left-behind children from the root, reduce the occurrence of psychological problems and enhance their subjective well-being, which is of great significance in promoting the healthy growth of left-behind children and the stable development of society.

Keywords: Rural Left-Behind Children; Subjective Well-Being; Psychological Problems; Mental Health Education

1. Introductory

With the rapid development of China's society and economy, the population flow between cities and rural areas has been growing year by year, and with the promotion of China's new urbanisation, the transformation of the economic development mode and the adjustment of the regional economic structure, China's total mobile population has shown the development trend of increasing and then decreasing during the period of 2010-2017. Data show that China's total mobile population continued to grow during the period 2010-2014, from 221 million in 2010 to 253 million in 2014, with a relatively moderate growth rate, averaging an annual increase of 8

million people and an average annual growth rate of about 3.39 per cent.

2. Status of Research

Along with the continuous growth of the migrant population, more and more "left-behind children" have appeared in rural areas. In April 2023, the National Bureau of Statistics, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) jointly and publicly released the "China's Child Population Situation in 2020: Facts and Figures", which shows that in 2020, the number of children (children of the migrant population) in China who are affected by population mobility was 138 million, accounting for about half (46.4 per cent) of the Chinese child population. In 2020, there will be 138 million children affected by population mobility (children of the migrant population), accounting for about half of China's child population (46.4 per cent), 71.09 million migrant children, and 66.93 million left-behind children (of which 25.16 million will be left-behind in cities and towns, and 41.77 million will be left-behind in rural areas). 2020 is the year when, according to incomplete statistics, there will be a total of 108 million children in China who cannot reside with their parents for various reasons, an increase of 30 per cent compared with 2010. In 2020, according to complete statistics, a total of 108 million children in China will not be able to live with both parents for various reasons, an increase of 30.46 million from 2010. Of these, 89.22 million will be children affected by population mobility, including 66.93 million left-behind children, and 22.29 million children who cannot live with both parents because of mobility.

These children are separated from their parents because their parents work outside the home for long periods of time and lack adequate family care and supervision, thus facing various psychological and life challenges. The

subjective well-being of left-behind children is not only related to their healthy growth, but also affects the stability and development of society. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to enhance the subjective well-being of rural left-behind children.

The purpose of the research in this article is to explore the needs of rural left-behind children, to find a real way for rural left-behind children to alleviate their psychological pressure, to pay attention to the children's heart from the root, to reduce the occurrence of psychological problems, and to enhance the subjective well-being of rural left-behind children.

Left-behind children usually refer to children who are left behind in their place of domicile while both or one of their parents are working outside the home for long periods of time. According to different studies, the age of left-behind children is mostly limited to below 18 years old, and most of them are in the stage of compulsory education. The number of left-behind children in China's rural areas is huge, numbering in the tens of millions according to different statistical calibres, and their distribution has obvious regional characteristics, mainly concentrated in provinces and cities with a high concentration of labour export.

In 2020, a total of nine provinces will have more than 3 million migrant children, with a combined total of 39.69 million migrant children, accounting for 55.8 per cent of the country as a whole. There are eight provinces with more than 2 million children left behind in rural areas, with a total of 25.7 million children left behind in rural areas in the eight provinces, accounting for 61.5 per cent of the country as a whole; Henan Province has the largest number of children left behind in rural areas, with more than 6 million. From this we can see that migrant children account for more than half of the total number of children in the country, while left-behind children in rural areas account for more than 60 per cent of the total number of migrant children. This shows that the number of left-behind children is very large, and the physical and mental health of the left-behind children also deserves our attention.

A number of scholars at home and abroad have paid attention to the psychological problems of children left behind in rural areas. In the article Research on the Relationship between

Perception of Discrimination, Sense of Loneliness and Level of Social Adaptation of Rural Left-behind Children, Guo Xiang explored the fact that rural left-behind children are more susceptible to external pressures than non-left-behind children, especially in the context of epidemics, and their physical and mental state and ability to adapt to changes in the environment need to be paid attention to^[1]. In Research Progress on the Impact of Left-behind Experience on Rural Children's Long-Term Development, Wang Yajun and Zheng Xiaodong et al. suggest that left-behind experience has an important impact on children's human capital accumulation, including cognitive ability, non-cognitive ability and health^[2]. In the article "Rural Left-behind Children's Psychological Development and Educational Problems", Zhou Zongkui and Sun Xiaojun et al. suggest that as a typical representative of children with low socio-economic status, rural left-behind children whose parents work outside the home have different degrees of problems with personal safety, learning, behaviour and psychological development, and believe that the problem of rural left-behind children requires the cooperation of measures in various aspects, including coordination among the family, the school, the community and the government. Co-operation^[3].

For the concern of left-behind children in rural areas, foreign scholars have also explored from the perspective of psychology about the relevant components of subjective well-being as well as the multiple dimensions that affect well-being. Subjective Well-Being (SWB) is an important construct in psychology that collectively reflects the pursuit of a happy life and refers to an individual's holistic assessment of his or her quality of life based on self-defined criteria. It consists of three basic dimensions: positive affect (e.g., positive emotional experiences such as joy, exhilaration, satisfaction, etc.), negative affect (e.g., negative emotional experiences such as sadness, anxiety, anger, etc.), and life satisfaction (which includes satisfaction with life as a whole, and with specific life domains such as work, family, and health). Scientific research on subjective well-being (SWB) can be traced back as far as the 1960s, when W. Wilson published the first article on the study of well-being, Correlates of Self-Reported

Happiness. The article laid the foundation for subsequent theoretical developments in subjective well-being, particularly the exploration of internal factors and adaptive theories, which became an important reference in the field of psychology.

Wilson wrote "Correlates of Self-Proclaimed Happiness", which marked the beginning of the study of subjective well-being in the psychological sense. After more than forty years of research and discussion, people's understanding of subjective well-being has gradually deepened. Diener (1984), a western psychologist, believes that subjective well-being refers to an individual's overall evaluation of his or her own standard of living in accordance with his or her own standards, which consists of a total of three dimensions, namely, positive emotion, negative emotion and life satisfaction, with positive emotion and negative emotion being the affective component, and Life satisfaction is the cognitive component. Diener's formal definition of happiness is a landmark in psychological research, and until today, many scholars have adopted his definition of happiness^[4]. Domestic scholars have also put forward some views on subjective well-being on this basis. In *Happiness in the Perspective of Psychology*, Miao Yuanjiang, through comparative analyses with the Psychiatric Symptoms Self-Assessment Scale (PSAS), found that there are significant correlations between multiple dimensions of well-being and indicators of mental health, and that negative affect is a key factor affecting well-being and mental health^[5]. Li Fang et al. in "A Comparative Study of the Influencing Factors of Subjective Happiness from a Cross-Cultural Perspective" compared the influencing factors of subjective well-being in different cultural contexts and explored the role of cultural differences in shaping subjective well-being. The study reveals the mechanism of social support, economic status, social values and other factors on subjective well-being in different cultures, emphasising the shaping role of cultural context on subjective well-being^[6].

At present, a total of 142 articles about the subjective well-being of left-behind children have been found on the Knowledge Network with the keyword of "left-behind children in rural areas", most of which focus on

left-behind children at a specific stage of schooling, and involve the fields of sociology and psychology, etc. The research content mainly stays in the exploration of left-behind children's own traits as well as the factors affecting the learning and growth of the left-behind children, and there is still a lack of thesis papers on how to improve the subjective well-being of left-behind children and the corresponding strategies. There is a lack of papers on how to improve left-behind children's subjective well-being and the corresponding strategies. In this paper, we start from the root of the problem and explore the different stages of growth of left-behind children in rural areas and the influence of different factors on them, so as to find out the strategies and methods to improve the subjective well-being of left-behind children.

3. Subjects and Methodology of the Study

The college students, aged between 18 and 25, were interviewed, mainly investigating their experiences during their childhood. In the research method, questionnaires are used to understand the family structure of the left-behind children, including whether both parents work outside the home, the structure of the left-behind children's families, age distribution, and labour force, etc.; to investigate the education of the left-behind children, including school education, family education support, academic performance, and educational resources, etc.; to understand the relationship between the left-behind children and their parents, including the frequency of communication, emotional ties, parent-child attachment, etc.; assessing the mental health of left-behind children, including depression, anxiety, loneliness, self-acceptance, aggressive behaviours, etc.; and finally, understanding the emotional needs of left-behind children, including the need for parental companionship. Through this comprehensive research method, a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the current situation and needs of left-behind children in Qiancheng Village can be gained, providing a basis for formulating effective strategies and interventions. At the same time, field surveys and interviews also help to build trusting relationships with left-behind children and their families and provide them with more care and support.

4. Research and Analysis

The questionnaire was issued on the topic of the living conditions of left-behind children, and the target group is mainly college students who have reached the age of 18. 104 questionnaires were returned, of which 104 were valid, among which the proportion of those who had the experience of left-behind children was about 36.54 per cent, and they were mostly from the rural areas, among which 53 per cent of them were female and 47 per cent male, which shows that it is more probable for females to become left-behind children. With regard to the description of the experience of staying behind, those who said that this stage lasted until junior high school accounted for the largest proportion, accounting for 46.15 per cent of the total number of people, which shows that most of the left-behind children have stayed behind for a longer period of time, which is about 16 years; with regard to the problems encountered during the period of staying behind, some people said that they had encountered more difficulties in their life and study, accounting for 38.6 per cent of the total number of people, which shows that left-behind children not only lack love and care psychologically, but should also be paid attention to. In the survey on who left-behind children are more willing to ask for help when they encounter problems in life and study, most of them said that they are more willing to ask for help from their classmates than from their guardians and teachers, which shows that most of the left-behind children are more willing to confide in their peers or play with them when they encounter problems; when asked what activities they would prefer to participate in to help them when left behind, some of them said they would be more willing to participate in activities to help themselves. When asked which activities they are more willing to participate in to entertain and relax themselves, most of them choose to listen to science lectures and participate in sports competitions, accounting for 58.65% and 52.88% of the total number of people respectively, followed by art training and outdoor development, both accounting for 40.38% of the total number of people, which shows that left-behind children are willing to participate in outdoor activities or lectures to acquire extracurricular knowledge outside

classroom time. It can be seen that the left-behind children would like to get knowledge outside the classroom by participating in outdoor activities or lectures.

5. Findings

Through the questionnaire survey of the relevant population, we can find that among the left-behind children, 38.46 per cent said that they encountered problems in life, and the same proportion encountered problems in study, indicating that left-behind children face challenges in both life and study, which requires that both life and study be considered when setting strategies. In terms of who to turn to for help, when encountering problems, 53.85% of left-behind children preferred to turn to their classmates for help rather than their guardians or teachers, showing that they preferred the support of their peers. For emotional needs, 89.42% of left-behind children chose to play with their peers when they were unhappy, showing their reliance on peer relationships. In terms of activity participation, 58.65 per cent of left-behind children said they were willing to participate in science lectures, 52.88 per cent were willing to participate in sports competitions, and 40.38 per cent were willing to participate in art training and outdoor outreach, showing that they had a high willingness to participate in extracurricular activities.

This data can help us better understand the specific needs and preferences of the left-behind group. It provides a favourable factual basis for strategy implementation.

6. Conclusions

1. According to the results of the study, in terms of life, the group of left-behind children is more willing to ask for help from their peers when they encounter problems, often ignoring the most experienced adults around them. Therefore, more life guidance can be provided at the school level, for example, by holding a life skills training course, so that more left-behind children can learn life skills, and do not feel overwhelmed and panicked when they encounter problems;
2. At the learning level, due to the limited growth and learning environment of left-behind children, they do not receive timely after-school counselling after school, and they usually acquire knowledge only through the

teaching of their teachers in the classroom. Therefore, schools and teachers need to provide more guidance on learning and life, such as homework help, extended hours classes, or more forms of activities that are fun and educational, to help left-behind children better solve the problems they encounter in life and learning.

3. In terms of emotional needs, due to the special psychological situation of left-behind children in rural areas, most of them leave their parents at an early age when they are just entering the school, and usually, the psychology of left-behind children in rural areas reflects the following characteristics: rebelliousness; negative emotions; withdrawn personality; and behavioural cognitive deviation. Their mental health has become a social problem that cannot be ignored, so how to strengthen the guidance of the community and the school to become, on the one hand, the community and the school to organise a variety of collective activities, such as group games, art creation, etc., not only to help left-behind children find a way to catharsis of their emotions, but also to educate and have fun; on the other hand, to let the guardian of the left-behind children to participate, to cultivate left-behind children and their guardian's emotions, to fill the lack of affection within the children's hearts. On the other hand, it allows left-behind children's guardians to participate in the programme, so as to cultivate their feelings for their guardians and fill the lack of affection in their hearts;

4. At the level of mental health education, schools and communities should also play a role in increasing the introduction of mental health education, setting up class psychologists to find out the psychological state of left-behind children in real time; setting up professional teams, and building a high-level, professional and vocational working team for mental health education by schools, including full-time teachers of psychology, part-time teachers of psychology, counsellors, etc., and organising regular mental health The schools

should build a high-level, professional mental health education workforce, including full-time teachers, part-time teachers and counsellors, and organise regular mental health lectures and training for them to enhance their professionalism. The community should carry out colourful mental health education activities, such as psychological drama performances, psychological knowledge competitions, and exhibitions on mental health themes, to attract children's attention and subconsciously educate left-behind children about mental health in a subconscious way.

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