

A Brief Analysis of Mental Health Problems of Rural Left-behind Children

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ABSTRACT

With the growing imbalance in China's regional development, many parents have to work in developed cities so they are forced to separate from their children, which makes these children become left-behind children. These left-behind children show different characteristics in many aspects compared with other children. The most typical one is the mental health problem. On the basis of existing literature data, the paper emphasizes on the analysis of their mental health problems from three perspectives: bad at communication, poor learning autonomy and cellphone addiction. The paper also put forward suggestions about how to solve these problems.

Keywords: *Left-behind children, rural. Mental health, online education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The LBC (left-behind children) in China are also called "stay-at-home children". They are the children who remain in rural regions of China while their parents leave to work in urban areas. In many cases, these children are taken care of by their extended families, usually by their grandparents or family friends who remain in the rural regions [1, 2].

According to the data of the Fifth Popularization in 2000, nearly 20 million left-behind children are living in rural China. Some experts conservatively estimate that the number of left-behind children under the age of 14 is at least more than 43.9 million. In some large rural labor export provinces, the proportion of left-behind children in the total number of local children is as high as 18%. Both parents are mobile, children cannot live with their parents in more than half of all left-behind children, the proportion is as high as 56.17%. The problem of left-behind children in rural areas caused by population mobility has become one of the social problems that cannot be ignored [3].

In fact, there are two factors contribute to the increase of left-behind children in China. On the one hand, the poverty of the family makes the parents have to leave the countryside to work in the city. On the other hand, the unfair treatment of "migrant workers" by the society make the majority of farmers have no means and ability to bring their children to the city[4, 5].

Due to the fact that these parents can't live with these children and take care of them, they cannot realize the psychological and ideological changes of their children at any time. The experience of being left behind by migrant parents has various impact on children's physical mental well-being.

Since all series of problems associated with being left behind, children are more prone to health problems. Left-behind children generally have a less healthy diet and lower rates of physical activity; lower intake of some nutrients and poorer physical development related to nutrition. Left-behind children are more likely to engage in unhealthy habits and extreme behaviors such as smoking and drinking alcohol. These particular habits have contributed to higher rates of stunted growth and unhealthy body weights [6].

Among these social problems, psychological problems of LBCs are the most noteworthy problems for left-behind children in rural areas. Approximately 50% of the left-behind children in China go through melancholy and apprehension[7]. Left-behind children exhibits more symptoms of depression and anxiety; stronger sense of feeling abandoned, anguished, suffering, and inferior. They are more likely to exhibit more selfish, indifferent, and introverted mindset[8]. These children are facing developmental and emotional challenges as a result of the limited interaction with their parents. The lack of infrastructure and parental support have led to additional challenges for left-behind children including quality

education, physical well-being, and healthy social relationships.

The severity of negative consequences that might experience by left-behind children in China depend on the child's age, gender, and family economic resources. Though great progress has been made in this field, there are still some unsolved problems such as how to tutor these children exactly without apply more pressure to the teacher, and how to give these children more love and care without their parents. Except for solve problems from the macro-perspective, some undeveloped resources such as online course softwares which has sprung up due to the epidemic hasn't been put to use in recent years, which is a great advantage we can make the most of. Besides, rather than force the children get rid of cellphone addiction, how to guide them use the cellphone properly is more important.

Based on the above literature, the emphasis of this paper is to analysis the main mental problems of LBCs and put forward related suggestions. This paper would be divided into two parts, the first part is to analysis the main mental health problems they met: bad at communicating, poor learning autonomy and cellphone addiction. The second part is the measures about how to solve the problems above. The paper would analysis the solutions from 3 perspectives: Government, school and family.

2. MENTAL PROBLEMS OF LBCs

In China, about 50% of left-behind children have experienced depression and fear compared with 30% of urban LBCs. Similarly, they are more likely to suffer from mood swings and trauma. They would show more symptoms of depression and anxiety. They have stronger feelings of abandonment, pain and inferiority as well as selfishness, apathy and introversion [8]. According to the research, the main psychological problems of left-behind children are as follow: Bad at communicating, poor learning autonomy and cellphone addiction.

2.1. Bad at Communicating

Due to the lack of love and care from family, some left-behind children gradually became introvert and bad at communicating. Since they got less attention from their parents, the personality transformation is one of the problems they may encounter during their growth, which mainly manifested as self-isolation and refuse to communicate with strangers. The lack of communication has negative impacts on their growth and prospect.

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Civil Affairs in 2018, 96% of the rural left-behind children are taken care of by their grandparents and 4% of the rural left-behind children are supervised by other relatives and friends. There are great limitations in their way of parenting. They are lack of understanding of new things

as well as the educational methods. Therefore, it is difficult for them to meet the needs of their children to receive family education. In fact, Family education plays an important role in the cultivation of the character of the left-behind children in rural areas, so the lack of family education may make the left-behind children in rural areas form a withdrawn character [9].

Besides, most of the left-behind children lack the appropriate self-confidence and when they come to unfamiliar places with large crowds, they are eager to escape from these places and avoid interacting with people. Even when they communicate with others, they would not express themselves fluently and intentionally, which shows their unconfidence [10]. At the same time, the absence of "escrow guardians" makes them watch TV for a long time, imitate people in the bureau, talk to themselves or talk to their puppies and kittens. Self-isolation has led to interpersonal sensitivity and weakening oral communication ability of some "left-behind children". Long-term self-closure has led to introverted seclusion of some left-behind children.

2.2. Poor Learning Autonomy

Firstly, due to the absence of parents, the guardian's educational level is comparatively low, so they undertakes all the housework and farmland work and does not have enough ability and free time to pay attention to the learning situation of the left-behind children, which results in their unregulated learning and incorrect learning attitude. For example, it is difficult to concentrate in class, homework is not completed carefully, absent from class and so on [10].

Secondly, Due to the lack of teachers in rural areas and the singleness of teaching methods, students' interest in learning can not be fully aroused in the classroom. Coupled with the fact that their parents go out to work all the year round, left-behind children can not get the encouragement and guidance of their parents in their studies. This makes children easy to lack enthusiasm for learning, and their grades are getting worse and worse, which eventually leads to dropping out of school and prematurely.

Thirdly, most of the left-behind children are taken care by the elder generation, which has a great impact on the children's learning. The left-behind children has no guidance and supervision from their parents while they're studying. Generally, their homework is taken care by their grandparents. Since most of these grandparents are less educated, they cannot judge the quality of their homework. Besides, grandparents are used to spoil their grandchildren. They are not willing to let their children become too tired for studying, so they often leave them alone with their mobile phones.

In addition, a big part of left-behind children are reluctant and unenthusiastic to go to school. Due to the

lack of funds and teachers, these schools can only meet the basic material needs of students but can not provide students with spiritual comfort like psychological comforting. Many of them become truants and some of them choose to drop out of school. The children's lackluster attitude towards school restricts their social mobility and keeps them the cycle of poverty. Generally, these children have lower educational goals and are less likely to complete compulsory education [11].

2.3. Cellphone Addiction

Most of the left-behind children in rural areas are young and immature. They are immature physically and mentally. They are easy to indulge in mobile games. At the same time, most of their guardians don't know how to deal with mobile phone addiction properly, so it is difficult to correct and prevent the bad thoughts and behaviors of LBCs in time. Mobile games lead to a lot of mental health problems of left-behind children in rural areas.

For these children, their parents go out to work for a long time, which make them feel lonely and helpless. the lack of love and care makes them feel lonely and helpless. Besides, the lack of social communication makes their study and life even more confused. Left-behind children are eager to communicate with others and are recognized. Through mobile games, left-behind children can meet like-minded friends in a virtual environment. To some extent, it gives them a chance to express themselves [12].

According to the research and the analysis of the data, only 7.37% of children have no interest in smart phones at all. 1.05% of children are deeply obsessed with mobile phones. The data shows that most of children are interested in mobile phone and nearly 4.5% of students cannot tolerate to live without mobile phones.

In addition, left-behind children spend longer time on mobile games. 19% of these children spend over six hours on games. Nearly two times more than those who are with their parents. However, the parents didn't take their child's extreme phone use as an issue. For these parents, mobile phones serve as "babysitters" to calm the children down and stay away from trouble [13].

Owing to the long-time usage of the phone, these teenagers' eyesight, physical quality, learning, physical and mental development are greatly affected by the cellphone addiction.

3. SUGGESTIONS TO SOLVE LBC MENTAL PROBLEMS

3.1. Government: Call for Action

The local governments could actively promote the development and transformation of the local economy, improving the structure of public expenditure and make

more money available on education and rural schools to further improve the rural school teaching and living conditions. The local governments could also promote the coordinated development of regional, urban and rural economy as well as narrow the income gap, so that parents can better stay and work in their hometown [14].

The government needs to guide parents to establish a correct conception of family education and master scientific methods of family education. To help them create an excellent family environment for the healthy growth of minors, it is clear that parents should reasonably arrange the time schedule for their children, so as to avoid increasing the learning burden and prevent them from indulging in the Internet [15].

Besides, The government should strengthen the publicity for the left-behind children and appeal to more members of the public to participate in the care and psychological construction activities of the left-behind children. Guide parents to improve their sense of responsibility and care for their children's mental health problems. At the same time, guide schools to strengthen psychological counseling for left-behind children.

3.2. School: Usage of Online Resource

With the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic gradually weakening, most schools have resumed offline teaching, but some online models have been retained. during the break of COVID-19, the online classes and educational resources has been developed a lot in recent years. For example, MOOC, Tencent meeting and zoom, etc. These softwares provide excellent platforms and medias for students and teachers to communicate. At the same time, millions of pre-record courses which covered all subjects are provided to students. Most of them are even free of charge, which reduce their economic pressure.

Aiming at the problems of low quality of homework and learning progress of left-behind children, Making the most use of online educational resources is a great way to fill their academic gap. For example, the teacher could set up the question message board online to let the students put forward the questions they don't understand. At the same time, the teacher could call the roll and check the homework through the internet, which is more efficient and convenient [16].

Secondly, schools could set up special psychological counseling rooms and be equipped with professional psychological counseling room and counseling teachers to provide psychological consult and related services for all students. Especially for left-behind children.

Thirdly, setting up some beneficial extracurricular activities. In rural counties, left-behind children have limited ways of recreation. Their after-school life is not that rich and colorful. Therefore, teachers could guide them to reading, painting or go hiking, etc. These

beneficial activities could distract their concentration from cellphone.

3.3. Family: Care for Children

Family is not only the place for eating and living, it's a place for love and care. Left-behind children communicate with their parents mainly through phone calls and wechat videos. Only a handful of children keep in touch with their parents every day. Most of the children spend time at school and stay home with other supervisors during holidays. Their social circle is relatively narrow. Video call is the main means of communication among left-behind families, but it cannot achieve effective communication between left-behind children and their parents[17].

Nearly all the parents of LBCs regard the better material life as the only way to cultivate children. But actually, The most important thing for the child is to grow up healthily. Parents should be responsible for children's family education and try their best to return to their hometown frequently. They need to communicate with children equally and let children feel the family's ubiquitous warmth and meticulous care, so as to meet the psychological security needs of children and the needs of being cared for. Parents should be aware of the concept that children's education and learning is not just the work of schools and teachers, parents' contribution on education is also essential. No matter how busy they are, they need to strengthen emotional contact with children and give them real-time supervision of their learning so that they can feel love and care.

Though some of parents cannot comeback for these children, they should still pay more attention to their growth. Most importantly, use the communication instead of preaching, which can narrow the generation gap and encourage the children to be more positive.

4. CONCLUSION

With the rapid development of China's economy, many rural residents choose to work in cities in order to raise their family. But at the same time, they left their children in their hometown and had no time to pay attention to their growth and psychological changes. It not only causes these children's physical health problems, but also causes the psychological problem.

The paper emphasis the mental health problems of LBCs from 3 perspectives: the lack of communication and isolation of LBCs caused by the social anxiety and proper guidance. The poor learning autonomy cause by lack of supervision. The cellphone addiction caused by spoiling and loneliness. In response to these problems, the paper put forwards 3 suggestions from different perspectives to solve these problems: The government should call for more attention and assistance for these

children, the school should set up counseling room, take advantage of online resource and give them proper guidance of using cellphone, the family needs to be responsible for their children and communicate more with them.

In conclusion, the mental health problems need to be focused and solved by the whole society. Their growth needs more love and care compared to the other children, and we need more apartments and people to participate in helping them. Only by making joint efforts can we fundamentally solve the psychological problems of the left-behind children.

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