



Review and Prospect of Research on Mental Health of Rural Left Behind Children at Home and Abroad

Zongli Han¹ and Yingnan Liang²(✉)

¹ School of Management, Dalian Polytechnic University, Dalian, Liaoning, China

² Department of Basic Teaching, Dalian Polytechnic University, Dalian, Liaoning, China
liang_ying_nan@163.com

Abstract. The left behind children in rural areas is a social phenomenon produced during the transition from agricultural society to industrialization and urbanization in China. As a result of the regional imbalance of social and economic development, a large number of rural surplus labor force flowed to the southeast coastal cities and central cities. While the labor force moved, the family life did not move synchronously. Solving the mental health problem of left behind children in rural areas is an important part of ensuring and improving the people's livelihood, meeting the practical needs of the people for a better life. This study reviewed the research progress and shortcomings of mental health problems of left behind children in rural areas at home and abroad, and proposed future research directions.

Keywords: Children left behind in rural areas · Mental health

1 Introduction

With the advent of the 21st century, China's economy has been developing rapidly. However, while the productivity and the level of productivity development are steadily advancing, the contradiction between the growing needs of our people for a better life and the unbalanced and inadequate development has become increasingly prominent. Among them, due to the reform of urbanization, the number of left behind children in rural areas has increased, which is particularly significant. According to the data released in the Report on China's Child Welfare and Protection Policy (2019), as of August 2018, there were 6.97 million left behind children in rural areas across the country. Once such a large group had mental health problems, it would have a serious impact on themselves, their families and society. On February 22, 2022, the State Council of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued the No. 1 document, Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Doing a Good Job in the Key Work of Comprehensively Promoting Rural Revitalization in 2022. The document mentioned that we should strengthen the overall planning of basic public services at the county level, and often visit empty nesters and left behind children [1]. In May of the same year, the General Office of the CPC Central

Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the Implementation Plan for Rural Construction Action. Rural construction is an important task to implement the rural revitalization strategy. There are still outstanding weaknesses and weak links in some areas in China. The healthy growth of rural left behind children is an important indicator to strengthen the construction of rural grass-roots organizations and further promote the construction of rural spiritual civilization [2]. The mental health education of left behind children in rural areas has become a realistic social problem.

2 Research Progress on Mental Health of Rural Left Behind Children Abroad

2.1 A Study on the Mental Health Status of Left Behind Children in Rural Areas

Simms (1991) found through research that there are obvious psychological and physiological problems in children raised by different generations, relatives and non relatives, and almost all left behind children have behavioral problems and emotional disorders to some extent [3]. Sarah et al. (2012) conducted a daily follow-up survey on 298 left behind children in rural Africa, and found that their parents went out to work because of their poverty in this area. These left behind children lack family care, so they have great mental health problems in cognition and thought [4]. Wickrage et al. (2015) investigated 820 age - and gender matched children in a cross-sectional study design using multi-stage random sampling. Social demography and health status data were derived using standardized pre validation tools. Two out of every five left behind children suffer from mental disorders, suggesting that left behind children may have social emotional disorders and behavioral problems without parents, and male left behind children are more likely to suffer from psychopathology [5]. Kilchan et al. (2016) found through research that compared with non left behind children, left behind children have problems such as separation from society, unwillingness to communicate with others, psychological imbalance, etc. They can't get along with others in a friendly way, and have a sense of loneliness. They often think that they are abandoned by their relatives. Therefore, left behind children differ from non left behind children in the formation of their outlook on life during their growth, lacking a sense of collectivity and honor [6]. Gracia (2018) conducted an observational study by investigating the impact of parents' migration on nutrition, mental health, accidental injuries, infectious diseases, material use, unprotected sexual behavior, early pregnancy and abuse of left behind children (0–19 years old). The results showed that compared with non mobile children, left behind children had higher risk of depression and depression scores, suicidal ideation, conduct disorder, substance use, emaciation and stunting [7]. Aryal (2019) found through the survey that an estimated 3.5 million Nepalese work abroad - leading to family separation, leaving thousands of young people behind. This will increase psychological and emotional pressure, as well as feelings of loneliness and abandonment, and reduce the self-esteem of left behind adolescents [8].

2.2 A Study on the Causes of Mental Health Problems of Left Behind Children in Rural Areas

McLeod (1996) explored the degree of influence of various factors on left behind children, and found that factors such as poverty, parental companionship, and war had a greater impact on the mental health of left behind children [9]. Hanson et al. (2004) found that due to the separation of parents and the lack of kinship, left behind children have to passively undertake housework, which has a negative impact on the growth and education of left behind children [10]. Pottinger (2005) found through research that the lack of parental affection led to changes in the lives and education of left behind children, weakened family functions, and brought mental health problems to left behind children [11]. Timo (2015) believed that the mental health problems of left behind children were caused by population migration or other needs due to rapid social development and unbalanced economic development between regions [12]. Elena et al. (2017) found in their research on the impact of parents on children's lives that when children's parents have mental health problems, their children's risk of suffering from mental health problems will increase [13]. Alina (2020) studied the impact of parents' migration on the education, physical and mental health of left behind children aged 11 to 15 in Romania, and used a unique representative survey data carried out in 2007 to make tool variables and bivariate Probit estimates. The results show that parents' migration has a significant positive impact on children's academic performance (reflected in higher grades), and the probability of suffering from depression and health problems is higher [14].

2.3 A Study on the Countermeasures to the Mental Health Problems of Rural Left Behind Children

Graham (2011) found that, compared with children from non immigrant families, children of immigrant fathers in Indonesia and Thailand are more likely to have negative psychological well-being. If the parents of immigrants can establish a good communication relationship with their children, the negative impact of immigration on left behind children can be better alleviated. If such a good communication relationship can be maintained for a long time, the mental health problems of these left behind children can be optimized or even eliminated [15]. Lukash (2017)'s research on left behind children shows that, since the father works alone, the mother will invest more time and energy in the child's growth. Although maternal love is more important, only parents take care of them together, left behind children will get more psychological comfort [16]. Jens et al. (2017) explored the impact of the United States on the mental health of children of parents who expel illegal immigrants. The results showed that when parents of these illegal immigrants were allowed to accompany their children, they had a positive effect on their children's mental health [17]. Treleaven (2019) found in the study that, while only relying on remittances to improve children's use of qualified providers in migrant export areas, policy makers need to address care barriers beyond costs to promote the use and fairness of higher quality care when remittances are a common source of income [18].

3 Research Progress on Mental Health of Rural Left Behind Children in China

3.1 A Study on the Mental Health Status of Left Behind Children in Rural Areas

Huang Junxia et al. (2006) found in their research on the mental health of left behind children in rural areas that left behind children tend to have negative emotions, and their characters will become inferiority, silence, pessimism, and isolation, showing wayward, irritable, indifferent, introverted, suspicious, jealous, rebellious and extreme symptoms [19]. Cao Guanghai et al. (2009) investigated some rural left behind children in Qufu City. The results showed that compared with non left behind children, rural left behind children have significant differences in learning anxiety, loneliness, physical symptoms, anxiety about people, loneliness, terror, physical symptoms, etc. [20]. Wang Gang et al. (2011) investigated the mental health status of left behind children in rural areas of Tianshui City. It was found that the mental health problems of left behind children in rural areas were mainly introverted, withdrawn, unsociable, with a decreased sense of well-being and not good at communicating with others [21]. Zhang Wennuo (2013) found that the main problems of rural left behind children in some areas of Gansu Province are learning problems, psychological problems and communication problems [22]. Wang Wengang (2017), through field visits and surveys, summarized the common mental health problems of left behind children, including personality defects, psychological barriers, changes in outlook on life, confusion about future development direction, etc. [23]. Wang zi (2018) found in his research on the mental health of left behind children in school and rural areas that most left behind children have serious interpersonal sensitivity, learning pressure and personality anxiety problems compared with non left behind children [24]. Zhang Yaru et al. (2019) analyzed the mental health problems of left behind children in rural areas based on field research in Zhushan County, Hubei Province, and found that left behind children in this area had significant problems in emotional management, social anxiety and loneliness [25]. He Honglian et al. (2021) summarized the mental health problems of left behind children in rural areas into three types: withdrawn, rebellious and inferiority complex through investigation and research [26]. Guo Nana (2021) found, with the help of authoritative data at home and abroad and typical case studies, that the long-term life and psychological needs of left behind children in rural areas could not be met, and they more or less had problems such as strong dependence, inferiority, poor psychological endurance and irregular behavior [27].

3.2 A Study on the Causes of Mental Health Problems of Left Behind Children in Rural Areas

Xiao Zhengde (2006) found that the lack of complete family education would lead to the psychological problems of rural "left behind children" by analyzing the research of Chinese researchers on rural "left behind children" in recent 10 years [28]. Wang Shuming et al. (2010) selected 2548 students from 6 primary and secondary schools in Hanchuan City by multi-stage random stratified sampling method. The results showed that the mental health level of left behind children in rural areas was significantly affected by father going out, mother going out and parents working out at the same time. Among

them, the mental health level of left behind children in rural areas was most affected by parents going out at the same time [29]. Zhu Yan et al. (2014) conducted a survey on rural left behind children in Dingxin Township and Xinxin Town, Guizhou Province. The results showed that the mental health status of left behind children was closely related to coping styles, and mental health was mainly related to children's negative coping styles [30]. Ge Airong et al. (2017) believed that the mental health problems of left behind children were mainly attributed to personality, interpersonal skills, emotions and cognitive behavior [31]. Tang Xiaoyang et al. (2018) found that the possible influencing factors of left behind children's mental health include gender, grade, economic income, parents' education level, academic performance, and whether they are left behind [32]. Liang Qinmiao et al. (2019) found through research that the mental health status of left behind children in rural areas is generally poor, because of the combined effect of multiple family factors such as parent-child relationship, family upbringing style, family function and family environment [33]. Xiang Fen et al. (2021) believed that the mental health problems of rural left behind children were caused by family factors such as lack of parents to accompany them, neglect of discipline in raising children from other generations, extreme values of left behind children caused by parents working outside, and failure to recognize the importance of knowledge [34]. Liu Yujun et al. (2021) found that although the theoretical frameworks adopted by different disciplines are different, the influencing factors can still be roughly summarized as social factors, family factors, personal factors and school factors [35].

3.3 A Study on the Countermeasures to the Mental Health Problems of Rural Left Behind Children

Wu Ni (2004) proposed to accelerate the reform of the registered residence system, gradually eliminate the gap between urban and rural areas, strengthen the construction of social organizations, increase the efforts of social forces to help children, establish the education and guardianship system for children in rural communities, strengthen the construction of rural boarding schools, and add psychological courses in rural school education [36]. Jiang Ronghua (2006) believed that in the social aspect, joint efforts should be made to create a good environment for the compulsory education of left behind children. Schools and educational researchers should study and attach importance to the compulsory education of left behind children as a new problem, and strengthen the education of rural left behind children's outlook on life and values [37]. Guo Yongqiang (2010) proposed that first of all, parents should change the concept of parent-child education and attach importance to the role of family education. Second, schools should increase investment in mental health education for left behind children, strengthen contact with parents, give left behind children more attention in life and psychology. In school management, they should establish an education group for left behind children, establish a sound education system for left behind children, and finally, all sectors of society should participate in and cooperate closely [38]. Zeng Huifang (2013) proposed countermeasures and suggestions from the four levels of government, society, school and family from the perspective of care. For example, the government should strengthen policy support for the disadvantaged group of left behind children, and the society should carry out care actions for left behind children and build care projects [39]. Qiao Honghui

(2016) proposed that parents should communicate with children more, schools should integrate the mental health education of rural left behind children into the curriculum, strengthen teachers, society should pay constant attention to the group of left behind children, and the government should put the health problems of rural left behind children first [40]. Xiao Fei (2018) proposed three measures to further strengthen social care, further improve family education and further improve school education to alleviate the negative effects of mental health problems of left behind children in rural areas [41]. Chen Lin et al. (2018) proposed that for students in primary school, healthy and beautiful music can not only purify the human mind, but also cultivate sentiment and aesthetic ability, which is an effective way to carry out mental health education; For middle school students, music education can help them form sound personality and promote their mental health [42]. Xu Xinzhou et al. (2019) believed that the mental health problem of left behind children in rural areas should be solved through the care and education of parents, the active cultivation of schools and the care of the society, which is a common force of family, school and society [43]. Chen Juhong et al. (2021) based on the perspective of community education, believes that community education can provide more abundant educational resources for left behind children, and at the same time promote the formation of a trinity educational environment of school, family and society. However, there are many difficulties in implementing community education in rural areas [44]. Liu Xiang'e et al. (2021) proposed that the government should vigorously support and establish the mental health archives of rural left behind children, that mental health institutions should give full play to their resource advantages, enhance their sense of social responsibility, that rural schools should improve the teaching level of mental health education, and strengthen family school interaction [45].

4 Conclusions

At present, many scholars at home and abroad have done a lot of research on the mental health of left behind children in rural areas. They have made a detailed analysis of the current situation of mental health, the problems in mental health and the causes, and put forward corresponding solutions from the school, family, society and individual levels. However, through the collation of the literature, it is still found that there are some deficiencies in the existing research.

Most of the existing studies have not made a clear distinction on the age limit of left behind children in rural areas, and the span in the age of left behind children in rural areas is relatively large. In addition, most of the research objects are located in too scattered regions, which makes the conclusions drawn from the study lack representativeness.

Most of the studies are conducted from the perspective of pedagogy, demography and sociology to investigate the mental health problems of rural left behind children. The research contents are largely the same, and the exploration of the mental health problems of rural left behind children lacks a deeper understanding.

Most of the relevant scholars, based on the theory of literature research, carry out theoretical elaboration or simple descriptive statistics, lacking empirical analysis of a large number of data, which makes the research results more data but less in-depth.

From the perspective of research objects, the future research should clarify the age limit of rural left behind children, focus on the research object and research area, make

the research object targeted and representative, so as to effectively alleviate the psychological difficulties and problems of rural left behind children in this region, and improve the mental health level of rural left behind children; From the perspective of research, the future research course combines multiple disciplines and perspectives, such as the combination with relevant theories and methods of rural revitalization strategy and psychology, to study the mental health problems and causes of left behind children in rural areas, enrich the theoretical system of mental health problems of left behind children in rural areas, and finally put forward targeted countermeasures and suggestions from a more detailed micro level, so as to provide useful suggestions for the future guidance of mental health of left behind children in rural areas, To provide theoretical basis for relevant departments to establish the working mechanism of caring for rural left behind children; From the perspective of research methods, future research should pay more attention to empirical analysis, systematically explore the specific causes of mental health problems of rural left behind children through qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis, provide data support for the positive and healthy development of rural left behind children.

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