



A Study on the Willingness of Rural Migrant Workers Start Their Businesses in Hometowns - Based on Survey from Northern Anhui

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Abstract. “Agriculture, rural areas, and farmers” have always been a focus of attention in China. Prioritizing the development of rural areas and agriculture, and comprehensively promoting rural revitalization is the primary task of China’s current development. This article explores the factors affecting the willingness of rural migrant workers (RMWs) in northern Anhui Province to return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship through online questionnaires and offline surveys. The survey results show that, in terms of gender, male RMWs outnumber female ones, and the willingness of male RMWs to return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship is slightly higher than that of female ones. From the perspective of age, the willingness of RMWs for entrepreneurship in their hometowns shows a U-shaped trend with age. Among the surveyed samples, over 60% of migrant workers are married, but the willingness of unmarried RMWs for entrepreneurship is higher. Under the pressure of stable income sources for family needs, if the number of family members surveyed exceeds 5 people, their willingness to start a business is relatively low. The willingness of RMWs for entrepreneurship in their hometowns is positively correlated with their education level, but the difference is not significant.

Keywords: northern Anhui region · rural migrant workers (RMWs) · returning hometown · willingness to start a business

1 Introduction

In 2023, China released “Opinions on Key Tasks for Comprehensive Rural Revitalization in 2023,” which emphasized the need to strengthen the construction of the rural talent pool, launch a campaign to cultivate rural entrepreneurial leaders, and encourage professional and technical personnel to return to their hometowns for employment and entrepreneurship. The document immediately sparked widespread attention and discussions on the internet. RMWs who return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship are the talent support for the rural revitalization strategy. Their return not only increases farmers’ income and broadens their income sources but also promotes the development of county

economies, which is conducive to the realization of the overall goal of promoting urban-rural integration and rural revitalization. As of the end of March 2022, the total number of people who have returned to and started businesses in their hometowns across the country has exceeded 11.2 million. The return of RMWs to their hometowns for entrepreneurship has become a new driving force for rural revitalization, playing an important role in solving the “three rural” issues, maintaining the achievements of poverty alleviation, and driving overall urban-rural development. It has important practical significance for promoting the rural revitalization strategy [1].

2 Literature Review

Some scholars have studied the reasons and influencing factors of RMWs' entrepreneurship when returning to their hometowns. Lijuan, Yi, Raoyi, Guojie, and Weiwei (2022) found that urban employment obstacles, policy support, and infrastructure are positively correlated with RMWs engaging in rural e-commerce entrepreneurship [2]. Chinese RMWs have similarities with early international immigrants in promoting rural development through remittances and gradually returning to their hometowns to start entrepreneurial activities. The social, economic, and institutional background of their hometowns can influence their intention to start businesses upon returning [3]. Digital finance provides an ideal entrepreneurial environment for RMWs returning to their hometowns. Can and Fusheng (2021) explore how digital finance affects the performance of RMWs entrepreneurship from this perspective [4]. Media coverage can also affect the entrepreneurial decisions of returning RMWs. Jinfa, Jie, Donghui, Yan, and Yijin (2022) investigated how media coverage of entrepreneurship influences the entrepreneurial intentions and decisions of RMWs [5]. Both personal internal factors and external environmental factors can affect the entrepreneurial ability of entrepreneurs. Yan, Yuqi, and Pengling (2023) constructed an index system for evaluating entrepreneurial ability and prioritized the factors that affect entrepreneurial ability [6].

On the other hand, some studies have focused on the role and consequences of RMWs returning to their hometowns to start businesses. Revitalizing rural industries can be effectively promoted by RMWs starting businesses upon returning home. Their success can attract more RMWs to start businesses. Xiaogang (2022) analyzed the actual situation of RMWs returning to their hometowns to start businesses, and used predictive methods and dynamic simulation models to predict the relationship between RMWs returning home to start businesses and revitalizing rural industries [7]. Returning farmers can share their entrepreneurial experience with other impoverished households, and based on the diffusion model of returning farmers' entrepreneurship, there is a broad prospect and great potential for improving rural poverty [8]. Li, Yue, and Liu (2022) conducted in-depth research on green entrepreneurship for RMWs returning to their hometowns, clarifying that green entrepreneurship guidance mechanisms can effectively increase entrepreneurial opportunities, promote the rational allocation of regional resources, and improve the success rate of entrepreneurship [9].

3 Investigation Design

The data used in this article is from a sampling survey of RMWs who returned to their hometowns in the northern part of Anhui Province from January to February 2023. This period coincided with the Chinese New Year holiday when RMWs returned home, which provided convenience for this survey. The survey targeted RMWs who have had experience working outside of their hometowns. The content of the survey mainly focused on the RMWs' intentions to start businesses after returning home and their basic personal characteristics. A total of 445 survey questionnaires were distributed, with 424 collected, resulting in an effective response rate of 95%.

4 Results

4.1 Distribution of Basic Characteristics of Samples

The statistical distribution of the survey participants is shown in Table 1. In terms of gender, male RMWs account for 57.78% of the total sample, while female RMWs account for 42.22%. In terms of age, the largest number of participants in the current sample are in the age range of 46–55, accounting for 26.65% of the total, followed by those aged 36–45, accounting for 23.35% of the total. RMWs aged 18–25 account for 19.58% of the total sample, while those aged 26–35 have the lowest proportion at 13.92%. Among the survey participants, over 60% are married RMWs, and the sample with a family size of 3–5 people has the highest proportion at 46.23%. In terms of education level, 21.46% of the RMWs in the sample only have a primary school education, while 56.6% have a secondary school education. The education level of RMWs is generally low, with only 21.93% of the sample having received higher education.

4.2 Cross-Tabulations

Willingness to Start a Business in Hometown - Based on Gender Difference

As shown in Table 2, 153 RMWs in the survey sample chose “yes” in the choice of whether they were willing to return to their hometowns to start their own business, of which 89 were men, accounting for 36.33% of the total number of men interviewed, and 64 were women, accounting for 35.75% of the total number of women interviewed. It can be seen that both in terms of number and proportion, men are slightly more willing to return to their hometowns to start their own businesses. This may be related to the traditional Chinese concept of “men dominating outside and women dominating inside”, but there may also be many other more complex influencing factors.

Willingness to Start a Business in Hometown - Based on Age Difference

As shown in Table 3, from the perspective of sample size, regardless of age group, the number of RMWs' willing for entrepreneurship in hometowns is small, and the majority are unwilling. In terms of proportion, the proportion of migrant workers willing to return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship in each age group is: 40.96%, 35.59%,

Table 1. Distribution of Basic Characteristics of Samples

Variables	Categories	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	245	57.78
	Female	179	42.22
Age	18–25	83	19.58
	26–35	59	13.92
	36–45	99	23.35
	46–55	113	26.65
	Over 55	70	16.51
Marital status	Married	258	60.85
	Single	166	39.15
Family size	Below 3 (Excluding 3)	122	28.77
	3–5	196	46.23
	Over 5 (Excluding 5)	106	25
Education level	Primary Education	91	21.46
	Secondary Education	240	56.60
	Higher Education	93	21.93

Source: Compiled by the author from questionnaires

Table 2. Willingness to return home to start a business-Based on gender difference

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Willingness to return home to start a business	Yes	89	64	153
	No	156	115	271
Total		245	179	424

Source: Compiled by the author from questionnaires

35.35%, 31.86%, 38.57%. The willingness of RMWs to return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship shows a U-shaped trend with age, possibly because young RMWs have active innovative thinking, are good at learning advanced technology and accepting advanced ideas in cities, and have the idea of breaking the conventional to change the current situation of their hometowns, so they have a strong desire for entrepreneurship. On the other hand, older RMWs have fallen behind in physical and mental abilities, and have less room for development in cities, so they are more willing to return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship or employment. Conversely, middle-aged workers are high-quality labor force that cities need for construction, and they have better wages and

Table 3. Willingness to return home to start a business-Based on age difference

		Distribution of sample age groups					Total
		18–25	26–35	36–45	46–55	Over55	
Willingness to return home to start a business	Yes	34	21	35	36	27	153
	No	49	38	64	77	43	271
Total		83	59	99	113	70	424

Source: Compiled by the author from questionnaires

development opportunities if they stay in cities, so their willingness to return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship is relatively low.

Willingness to Start a Business in Hometown - Based on Marital Status

Table 4 shows that 34.49% of married RMWs are willing to return to their hometowns to start their own businesses, while 38.55% of unmarried RMWs are willing to return to their hometowns to start their own businesses. Although the number of married in the sample is greater than that of unmarried, the willingness of unmarried RMWs to return to their hometowns to start their own businesses is higher. This may be because for unmarried RMWs, they are not bound and controlled by their families and marriages, so they are freer and more willing to start their own businesses.

Willingness to Start a Business in Hometown - Based on Family Size

Among the surveyed subjects, as shown in Table 5, the willingness to return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship is 34.43% for households with less than or equal to 3 people (excluding 3), 40.31% for households with 3–5 people, and 30.19% for households with more than 5 people (excluding 5). It can be seen that the willingness of RMWs to return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship shows an inverted U-shaped distribution with the number of family members. If the surveyed subject comes from a family with more than 5 people, their willingness to return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship is the lowest. This may be because migrant workers with larger families need to face more family expenses and burdens, such as children's education and elderly care, which require a stable source of income. Compared to returning to their hometowns for entrepreneurship, stable urban employment may be more secure.

Table 4. Willingness to return home to start a business-Based on marital status

		Marital status		Total
		Married	Single	
Willingness to return home to start a business	Yes	89	64	153
	No	169	102	271
Total		258	166	424

Source: Compiled by the author from questionnaires

Table 5. Willingness to start a business in hometown - Based on family size

		Family size			Total
		Below3	3–5	Over 5	
Willingness to return home to start a business	Yes	42	79	32	153
	No	80	117	74	271
Total		122	196	106	424

Source: Compiled by the author from questionnaires

Table 6. Willingness to start a business in hometown - Based on education level

		Education level			Total
		Primary	Secondary	Higher	
Willingness to return home to start a business	Yes	32	85	36	153
	No	59	155	57	271
Total		91	240	93	424

Source: Compiled by the author from questionnaires

Willingness to Return Home to Start a Business-Based on Education Level

Table 6 reports a cross-analysis of the willingness of RMWs' entrepreneurship in hometowns and their educational level. Among the RMWs who received elementary education, 35.16% are willing to start a business, while 35.42% of those with secondary education are willing to do so, and 38.7% of those with higher education are willing to return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship. From these data, it can be seen that the willingness of RMWs to return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship is positively correlated with their level of education, but the difference is not significant. The willingness of RMWs with higher education to return to their hometowns for entrepreneurship is slightly higher, which may be because higher education can provide a broader perspective, more skills, and knowledge, making RMWs more confident and capable of returning to their hometowns for entrepreneurship.

5 Conclusions

Using survey data from 424 returning RMWs in northern Anhui, this paper explores the factors affecting migrant workers' willingness to start businesses in hometowns after descriptive and cross-tabulation analyses. The results of the study show that, from the gender perspective, the proportion of male RMWs is more than that of female, and the willingness of male RMWs to start businesses is slightly higher than that of female. In terms of age, the willingness of RMWs to start their hometowns' entrepreneurship shows a U-shaped trend in relation to their age. The number of RMWs aged 46–55 in the sample is the highest, but the proportion of those willing to return to their hometowns to start their businesses is the lowest. The proportion of married RMWs in the survey sample

is over 60%, but the willingness of unmarried to start their hometowns' businesses is higher. Respondents' willingness to start a business is relatively low if their household size exceeds five, due to the pressure on their families to have a stable source of income. The willingness of RMWs to start their businesses in hometowns is positively related to their education level, but the difference is not significant.

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