

## The Mental Health of Left-behind Children in Yanbian Area

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**Abstract.** To explore the status of mental status and emotional needs of the left-behind children in Yanbian area in Jilin province, we investigated the mental status and the frequency and content of the children with their parents of 424 left-behind children in Yanbian area. The results showed that the frequency of the children with their parents was less, they may be slower in physical and emotional growth than their peers, they feel more lonely and more anxiety. Meanwhile, the absence of parental support will make some left-behind children lack self-confidence. They generally have strong affection to stay with their parents. Some may even become "problem youths". More attention and education should be put on the left-behind children in Yanbian area.

### Introduction

Yanbian area is located in the border of China, Korea, Russia, because of its special location and specific cultural environment, a lot of people especially the young women head to Korea. As a growing number of couples head to Korea in search of work and are thus forced to leave their children behind in Yanbian area. The number of these left-behind children living with their grandparents or other relatives is currently estimated at 51 thousand. In a school enrollments survey of elementary school, junior school, high school in Yanbian area, left-behind children accounted for 51.28%, 60.23%, 60.20% of school enrollments [1].

The problem of left-behind children in Yanbian area is very big, it has some similarities with the other left behind children in other rural China, but it also has its special characteristics. In recent years, some scholars have reported some characteristics of left-behind children. First, the relationship of left-behind children with their guardian was very complicated; More mothers than fathers head to Korea[2]; The proportion of left-behind children in city is higher than in rural; The separation time of left-behind children with their parents is longer[3], According to a small-scale research, 37% of left-behind children aged 14–16 thought of committing suicide, 12% once planned to commit suicide and 6.3% once committed suicided but fail. Children have more than 60% chance of considering suicide when either father or mother left home for work [4].

A consistent conclusion hasn't been formed from the current studies of left-behind children. Most researchers mainly focus on description of their status, less attention has been paid on to case study and quantitative study. The difficulties and challenges will be explored in this study, countermeasures should be put forward.

It is an important problem to build a harmonious society, we should correctly understand the complexity and long-term of the left-behind children problem and take concrete measures to properly solve the problem of left-behind children. If the effective measures are not taken on time, the social development of left-behind children will be impacted. The special group will encounter a lot of challenges, including stark psychological and emotional problem, lack of guardianship, short of comfort and some other problems as well as challenges to

their personal safety and well-being. If the problem can't be paid enough attention, those children will suffer a lot setbacks.

### Problem of left-behind children in Yanbian

424 left-behind children between the ages of 6 to 12 from one elementary school in Yanbian were selected. Mean age was 9.4, 203 male and 221 female. Questionnaire of mental health was used. We also investigated the communication with their parents, level of self-esteem, emotional need, play hooky and et al.

In most cases, left-behind children mainly rely on the phone and the internet to communicate with their parents. Results showed that 72% parents work in South Korea, the number in Japan or other countries accounted for 11%, 18% of them work in other parts of China. So much parents have to work abroad, about 8% among them can go home once every 3 months; About 14% of them can go home half a year; While, most parents can only go home once one year or longer (about 78%), especially longer the parents who work in Korea. The parents can not make their relationship with their children very tightly, either in life or spiritual, they can't put enough attention and love to their children .

These are some psychological performance and behaviours of left-behind child. First, their self-esteem are low, they have feeling of inferiority, but at the same time very self-centred. They are not confident to their appearance and intelligence. Second, their emotional problem, anxiety and depression tend to cause psychosomatic disorder. They are rather hostile and feeling lost.

Table 1 the sex difference on the mental health of left-behind children (M(SD))

	Boys	Girls	t
anxiety	3.61(2.12)	3.66(2.01)	-0.658
lonely	2.56(2.06)	1.86(1.68)	3.502**
scared	2.07(2.04)	3.15(2.40)	-4.369**
sensitive	5.13(2.36)	5.14(2.45)	0.098
symptom	4.86(2.87)	5.16(2.56)	-1.034

(\*\* p<0.01)

From table 1, we can see that the difference of lonely and scared between boys and girls are significant. Boys feel more lonely than girls and girls feel more scared than boys. There have no significant difference on anxiety and sensitive between boys and girls. We also discuss the difference between the children whose mother leave their home to work and whose mother stay home, see table 2.

Table 2 the mothers's status( stay at home or leave) difference on the mental health of left-behind children M(SD)

	Stay home	leave	t
anxiety	3.41(2.12)	3.86(2.01)	1.909
lonely	1.89(2.06)	2.49(1.68)	-3.288**
scared	2.57(2.04)	3.45(2.40)	-4.369**
sensitive	4.95(2.36)	5.44(2.45)	-2.232*
symptom	4.96(2.87)	5.56(2.56)	-2.260*

(\*p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01)

From table 2, we can see that left-behind child whose mother leaving their home perform worse than left-behind child with mother at home in the above psychological performance and behaviours .

In addition, we found that in most cases, left-behind children mainly rely on the phone and the Internet to communicate with their parents.

We investigated “what is the children’s most unhappy thing”, 48.3% of left-behind children choose “they study hard, but their achievement is still no obvious progress” option, there are 27.8% of the children said “their parents work very hard every day, but there is no obvious improvement on their family economic conditions”, another 21.7% of the kids think “they usually can’t be understand and they can’t communicate with the teachers and students very well”.

From our survey, we also found that the left-behind children tend to attribute their own fault to others by self-defence mechanism such as fantasy or regression. We found that the left-behind children, especially boys, tend to skip classes or even leave the school. Their living habits are worse comparing to other children in school dormitory. They have lower satisfaction to livelihood.

## Discussion

Research has shown that childhood is the key period to the psychological and social foundation of children [2]. Family is the most important environmental for children to communicate emotion, and parents are their most important and the most stable communication object. Due to the long and poor communication with their parents, the left-behind children have more body and mind disease, and that will produce great negative effects on the formation and development of the left-behind children's personality and socialization process. In a state of mental, physical and psychological development of children, if the problems cannot be effectively solved during this period, they can produce cognitive or emotional obstacles.

The main way of communication between left-behind children and parents is on the phone and internet, then, the length of the talk time and the quality will directly affect their communication. We found that, after the parents head to work, the content of their communication with children is more concerned about their life and study, tending to ignore their emotional needs. Children and parents communication mainly involved in their school performance, life needs. They always give enough material and money to their children, while they ignored the emotional communication with their children, and they are lack of proper communication skills. Left-behind children generally miss their parents strongly. It was found that most left-behind children lack of effective communication with their parents, they can't get enough care and warmth, which will make a lot of left-behind children more introverted personality, causing them to produce serious affection.

We found that long-term living separately with their parents, the lack of communication between the members of the family and the lack of emotional support to the inner world of left-behind children has had a profound impact, negative affection between children and parents began to emerge.

From previous studies and our study, we found that the mental health of left-behind children is poorer. Left-behind children are prone to depression, anxiety, inferiority, social disharmony. The possible reasons might be: (1) After the parents head to work, the left-behind children will be raised by grandparents or other relatives, they can’t give quality education on those children. (2) There are a lot of family education problems, the ways to educate their children are not proper.

The performance on the above behaviours depends on the resilience of children. Some children actually perform better than normal children in psychological performance or other behaviours. The determining factors could be the age, sex, age of becoming left-behind child, frequency of meeting or contacting with parents and communication way with parents, their mother stay home or not.

## Education

In order to solve the problem of left-behind children, some action should be taken. The government has issued new guidelines to protect left-behind children. Such as establishing "left-behind children birthday card" system, those were organized by the teacher in charge of personnel in the detailed class birthday information for each of the left-behind children.

A lot of "home of students" was established in Yanbian area, which is for the left-behind children with full-time tutors for "family" education, they can study security guards. Many schools have set up a special psychological consulting room equipped with psychological teachers, the target is psychological health education. On the other hand, schools should carry out psychological education work, pay much attention to students' psychological counseling and guidance, for example, "xinyu cabin" can be set up. Children should be encouraged to trust their teachers and tell their confusion and trouble to the teachers [5].

Second, establishing a good school, parents communication mechanism

The school and the teacher should also keep in close contact with parents and guardians and tell the child's life and the study status to them in time, and they should solve problems in time, a good living environment and learning environment should be provided for the children.

## Summary

There are some psychological problems of left-behind child. To solve those problem, a positive and effective communication mechanism and good family-school communication bridge, a three-dimensional healthy education system (school, family and society) should be established.

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