

Study on the Psychological Problems of Left-Behind Children in Rural Areas and Countermeasures

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Abstract

The issue of left-behind children in rural areas is a social problem which arises in the process of urbanization in which labor forces in rural areas migrate to urban cities. With the expedition of the process of industrialization and urbanization, a large majority of rural labor forces flow to urban cities. As a result, the phenomenon of left-behind children becomes more prominent who have become an important group in building a harmonious socialist society in China. As they are isolated from their parents for a long period of time, quite a lot of left-behind children have the problems of inferiority complex, psychological inversion, interpersonal disorder and deviation between personality and behavior, etc.. The underlying reasons for these problems are absence of parents' education, inappropriate education by guardians, inadequate school education and unhealthy social education, etc. This paper suggests improving family education, making full use of resources in school education, integrating social power to construct the education and custody system of left-behind children and educating left-behind children to strengthen their own psychological quality cultivation, and doing a good job of education in left-behind children in rural areas.

Key words: Left-behind children in rural areas; Psychological problems; Countermeasures

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since the reform and opening up in China, with the expedition of the process of urbanization in China, more and more rural surplus labor forces migrate to urban cities. Due to multiple limitations of economic and living conditions, the children of an overwhelming majority of migrant workers are unlikely to live together with their parents in the cities, and are left behind in rural areas, living together with their ancestors or entrusted to the care of their uncles or the friends of their parents. Such children have formed a particular group, which is called left-behind children. It is shown by a survey, the detection rate of psychological disorder among rural children is as high as 19.8%, which means that almost one out of five children has the psychological problem or abnormal behavior. Another survey shows, 55.5% left-behind children manifest such characteristic features as self-willedness, indifference, introversion and loneliness. If the above psychological problems fail to be resolved in time, they will not only give rise to psychological injury to the left-behind children and bring about unstable factors, but will also cause hidden dangers to construction of the harmonious society. This, without doubt, is worth pondering and deserves to be resolved with promptness.

1. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN IN RURAL AREAS IN A NEW ERA

Rural left-behind children are the children whose parents and/or parent migrate to other areas to seek to work at a historical period when surplus rural labor forces need to be transferred and who are left behind in the place of domicile or are brought up and cared by their grandparents, other relatives or the friends of their parents. Emergence of this particular vulnerable group arouses wide attention of the whole society and is one

of the issues that need to be resolved with urgency by the modern society. In order to have a profound idea of the educational problems encountered by this particular group, the first thing to do is to have an idea of its current situation.

1.1 The Huge Number of the Group Presenting a Rising Trend

According to the survey statistics by the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), there are approximately 58 million left-behind children in rural areas currently, which account for 28.29% of the total rural children. Furthermore, those children both of whose children migrate to seek to work and who live apart from their parents account for more than half of the total left-behind children, as high as 56.17%. In the past few years, for the need for economic and social development, more and more peasants have migrated to seek to work, as a result of which the number of left-behind children becomes increasingly huge.

1.2 The Serious Phenomenon of Young Age of Left-Behind Children

It is shown by the data that, the four age groups of preschool (0-5 years old), primary school age (6-11 years old), the junior middle school age (12-14 years old) and the senior middle school age (15-17 years old) respectively account for 27.05%, 34.85%, 20.84% and 17.27% of the total rural juveniles. The proportion of the left-behind children under the primary school age reaches above 61% and the number of those under the age of 14 is at least 43.9 million above. What's more, the age of married migrant workers in rural areas becomes younger, the age of left-behind children gradually presents a lowering trend.

1.3 General Lack of Family Education and Effective Supervision

The majority of left-behind children are unable to get warm affection or normal custody of the parents since their parents migrate to seek to work. Furthermore, due to irresponsible care or limited capacity of the guardians of entrustment, the left-behind children are left at an unfavorable educational environment. As a consequence, some left-behind children are prone to a lot of problems in terms of school work, psychology and behavioral habits, etc..

2. MAIN PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN IN RURAL AREAS

2.1 The Inferiority Complex Is Relatively General

It is shown in the investigation on some rural left-behind children, most of them have the serious problem of

inferiority complex. As their parents do not live together with them, the left-behind children have no one to depend on or to get strong protection from. Thus, compared with the children whose parents are always with them, the former is likely to have the inferior psychological disorder. Once the sense of inferiority complex takes shape, it will exist in the form of a negative emotional experience. Since the objective environment and subjective cognition are unchangeable, not only will be this kind of inferiority emotion not be reduced, it will but also be increased and generalized, seriously affecting the physical and psychological health of the children. The more intimate the relationship with the parents and the more abundant the emotional exchange, the more obvious the problem of inferiority complex when the parents migrate to seek to work.

2.2 The Solitary Psychology and Interpersonal Disorder

The psychological study shows, all children are inclined to be attached to their parents. Attaching is the interpersonal relationship that is formed the earliest after an infant is born. The degree and nature of attaching has a direct effect on the sense of trust of a child in the surrounding world and affects their emotional feeling, social behavior and personality feature. As their parents stay out for a long period of time, the left-behind children in rural areas have no minimum psychological exchange. Hence, their internal annoyance and conflicts neither have place to pour out nor get any guidance, which makes them lack sense of security and sense of trust in the external world. This emotional deficiency has a serious impact on their social interaction with others. The study of Zhou Zongkui et al. finds that, quite a large part of children have the sense of alienation after their parents go to urban cities to work. They even refuse to talk with others during a certain period of time and become autistic. Solitary personality, vulnerability and eagerness for affection are the largest psychological problems among left-behind children in rural areas.

2.3 Deviation Between Personality and Behavior

Since the parents of rural left-behind children work outside the rural areas for a long period of time, they are unable to share parents' guidance and assistance in terms of ideological understanding or in terms of view of values. As they do not get parents' care and protection in the process of growth, they are prone to deviation in cognition and values and abnormality in the development of personality. On one hand, the children may become timid, coward, internally closed, emotionally indifferent, behaviorally solitary and lacking of love and the initiative in communication as they feel they are deficient of their parents' protection. On the other hand, without constraint of the parents, the children become abnormal in personality and out of order in behavior, manifested

as short-temper, impulsion and irritability, frequently escalating trivial matters to exchange blows and beating and scolding teachers and classmates, and even the ancestors. A small minority of left-behind children offend the discipline or commit a crime under the influence of unhealthy gangs in the society.

2.4 The Psychological Inversion Is Serious

Left-behind children in rural areas have strong psychological inversion and serious resistance emotion. They are lacking in the sense of security and full of doubts in all around them. They always look at the world with tinted spectacles and, moreover, they are full of distrust in the relations between human beings. This kind of subconscious distrust gives rise to their behavior of inversion, frequently manifested as “disobedience”, “impoliteness”, “immodesty”, and “practical joke”, etc.. The left-behind children always have the feeling that they are being bullied, so they fuss about a trivial matter and take it seriously, on guard against and even hostile towards others while they communicate with them, and have strong psychological inversion on control and criticism of their guardians and relatives.

3. AN ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES FOR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN IN RURAL AREAS

3.1 Absence of Parents' Education

Lack of complete family education is an important reason for the psychological problems of left-behind children in rural areas. Education of parents has a direct, sustaining and unconscious influence upon growth of the children. As for a large majority of children, the parent-child relationship plays a crucial role in the process of their growth. As rural left-behind children are separated from their parents for long, they are neither likely to have normal emotional exchange with their parents in a good parent-child relationship not likely to obtain direct emotional experience. As a result, they are deficient in the sense of security or self-esteem and they become hostile and anxious in their mind.

3.2 Inappropriate Education by the Guardian

Custody of left-behind children mainly includes the two types of transgenerational custody and parent-generation custody. In the former type, most of guardians are the ancestors of the children, including their grandparents and maternal grandparents, etc. The way of thinking and life habits of the ancestors are mostly off the beat of the times, so they are unfavorable to socialization of the children and are likely to result in maladaptation of the children. Most of the ancestors spoil the children and

relax their requirements and restrictions on children. As a result, it is likely that the children may form the unhealthy personality of being cunning and stubborn and self-willed and conduct these unhealthy behaviors. Parent-generation custody is a mode in which the parents are raised by the contemporary of the parents, usually their relatives or friends. Supervision of the children in this mode of custody is also far less vigorous than that of the parents. Firstly, the relatives or friends have to maintain their own means of livelihood and have difficulty in dedicating themselves to the education on the left-behind children. Secondly, the left-behind children are not their own or they spoil excessively on the children, as a result of which the children are likely to form some unhealthy habits and characteristics. Otherwise, they are too strict with the left-behind children, so the children are likely to have negative and resisting emotion and behaviors.

3.3 Inadequate School Education

School is an important occasion for learning and growth of rural left-behind children, and school education has a direct effect on the growth of left-behind children. However, limitations of the school running conditions, educational principles and power of teacher faculty restrain healthy psychological development of left-behind children. Currently, a better supervision and protection measure for left-behind children are to choose boarding. Yet, a large part of rural schools has no qualification for boarding. Even if they have, the conditions of boarding are too bad. Besides, the course of psychology is rarely set up in rural schools and students rarely receive education regarding survival, security and legal system, so there is no correct guidance on the healthy psychological development. Some teachers ignore communication with left-behind children. A proportion of 75.0% of left-behind children reflect that their teachers have never paid a home visit. The feeling of being ignored and deserted has a serious effect on their psychological development.

3.4 Unhealthy Social Education

So far as the current condition of education in China is concerned, there are too few institutions in the society which furnish effective assistance on juveniles' and children's development. Especially in the vast rural areas, as there are few grass-root organizations or there are no relevant juvenile or children community educational organizations. As a result, education and growth of rural juveniles and children is still at a vacuum condition in community education. Left-behind children are those at the school age, and some unhealthy social factors, eg. modern media have great permeability and some vulgar works are quite likely to affect these children in the air. At this time, weak or uncontrolled family supervision will provide soil of breed for their undesirable tendency.

4. COUNTERMEASURES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH EDUCATION ON LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN IN RURAL AREAS

4.1 Consummate Family Education and Fully Perform the Educational Function of Parents and Guardians

To perform the educational function of parents is to require the parents to keep in frequent contact with their children. In addition to life, health and study, parents should also pay attention to emotional exchange and psychological communication with their children. Parents may tell their parents about their experience in working outside to get their understanding and respect and to let them form a correct view of life. On the other hand, the guardians ought to establish the role consciousness and real burden the responsibility and obligation to bring up the left-behind children. Neither should they allow the left-behind children to drift, nor they should spoil these children. Instead, they should reach a balance between strictness and love. In the meantime, they should have ideological communication with the left-behind children at regular intervals to have an idea of their need and psychological status and get in contact with their parents and the school in time to take measures together to facilitate the healthy growth the children.

4.2 Make Full Use of Resources in School Education and Perform the Educational Function of the School

It is a must for the educational institution where the left-behind children reside to make full use of all kinds of educational resources by all means to make more contributions to the healthy psychological development of the left-behind children. In the first place, the school needs to set up special psychological counseling room which is equipped with psychological guidance and counseling teachers to provide psychological guidance and counseling service for all the teachers and students. In the second place, it is necessary to establish the home visiting system and parent school. The psychological counseling center offers training on parents and the guardians to enable them to correct the concept of education in their mind and master methods and skills to communicate with the children. Also, the center can discuss and popularize advanced experiences in family education. In the third place, it is necessary to set up peer counseling group for left-behind children. In interaction and activities of the group, the left-behind children are able to share mutual joy, understand and share mutual annoyance, and talk about their confusion and doubts in the process of growth. The interactive activities help to cultivate their attaching to the collectivity and sense of belonging and for positive emotional experience. The teachers can pay close attention

to the counseling group and provide planned guidance and participation so as to enable the peer counseling group of left-behind children to become an effective approach for facilitating the healthy psychological development of the children.

4.3 Integrate Social Power and Construct Education and Supervision System for Left-Behind Children

Governmental sections at all levels divide explicitly and shoulder their own responsibilities and set up a system of education and supervision on left-behind children in which the family, the school and the society make joint efforts and take part with coordination. This is to form joint forces of social education, school education and family education and promote healthy development of left-behind children. First of all, the community residents committee needs to make an investigation of the population, address, age and family background of left-behind children and make supplementary supervision on left-behind children. Then, the community may launch abundant youth programs, e.g. public benefit activities to create an environment for the left-behind children to take part in social practice, counseling activities to understand the parents and resolving any problem which the left-behind children may encounter. In these activities, the left-behind children may be given positive guidance, e.g. praising and encouraging left-behind children through activities to carry forward the spirit of self-discipline and self-improvement, setting up "charity voluntary service team to show care for left-behind children", providing part of extra-class education on left-behind children and cooperating with the guardians to educate and supervise the left-behind children.

4.4 Left-Behind Children Should Strengthen Cultivation of Psychological Quality

As a matter of fact, all the psychological problems and annoyance of left-behind children can be deemed as an outcome of lack of a correct attitude towards the reality and inward imbalance. It is a reality that the parents of left-behind children migrate to seek to work, which the left-behind children should confront and face with a healthy attitude. In the actual situation that the children are unable to change the reality that their parents work outside, the only choice is to learn to adjust themselves and improve their psychological adaptive capacity. A left-behind child needs to learn to be self-confident, independent and tough and treat it as a test and exercise that their parents are not around them. They need to set up an objective, foster different interest, correct their attitude towards learning and treat learning as an interesting thing. They should get in more touch with their teachers and classmates, take the initiative to communicate with their parents and have the courage to face and overcome all problems and difficulties encountered in both life and learning.

CONCLUSION

In a word, as a complicated social issue, the issue of rural left-behind children will exist for long along with industrialization, urbanization and rural population flow. The issue of education on rural left-behind children not only relates to the healthy growth of left-behind children and harmony of the a family, but also concerns rural economy in ethnic minority areas in the borderland and stability of social development and construction of the new socialist countryside and the harmonious society. Thus, it is necessary give full play to the functions of the government at all levels, the family, the school and the society, which can form joint forces and work out feasible methods and measures to resolve the issue of rural left-behind children.

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