

# Exploring Left Behind Children in China

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**Abstract.** With the rapid development of urbanization, more and more rural labourers decide to move out to the cities. But a large number of families of these out-migrating labourers are still in rural areas, so that their children are growing up with a serious lack of parental supervision and companionship. The education and psychological aspects of left-behind children have also become a major problem that needs to be taken seriously by society. This article reviews the previous studies of left-behind children in China, which aims to analyze the impact of Chinese children whose parents are working outside the home to urban cities in Rural communities and provides corresponding solutions. This article also explores how the restriction of resource distribution to migrant workers influences their children's education status. This article's major focus is also the claim that children's educational development is negatively impacted by a lack of parental connection and monitoring.

**Keywords:** Left-behind Children; Psychological development; Education.

## 1. Introduction

As China's economic market continues to develop, it has driven more and more rural labourers to move to cities and abroad. Big cities tend to have more job opportunities, causing rural labourers to choose to migrate for betterment. The Chinese central government created the Household Registration System in the 1950s, which allowed all Chinese individuals to register as residents of a certain location, which was often their place of birth. [1]. However, there are becoming more migrant children and kids who are abandoned in rural areas because of highly mobile parents being obliged to send their kids to migrant schools or abandon them in their agricultural hometowns owing to impediments to obtaining educational facilities outside of their place of origin. The Chinese government introduced a household registration system to protect the interests of urban residents and to better manage rural residents. The household registration system was a strong political policy and turned cities into capital-intensive, economically developed places where only a few could stay [2]. Besides, some of the basic welfare in the cities favored those who were given local household restrictions in urban areas. The local household restriction has limited the public resources of education in the cities for children of migrant workers. The urban local household registration of urban cities has also discriminated against rural households [3]. In other words, urban households tend to have more access to better economic and educational resources than rural households, even when migrant workers are employed in urban cities. Migrants typically work in labor-intensive marketplaces in cities, which are more demanding and have more challenging working conditions, in order to improve their family environment and economic circumstances. [2].

The latest policy on local household restrictions updates the educational mandate so that students in rural areas must also participate in three-year high school and six-year junior high school, for a total of nine years of compulsory education [4]. In order to continue their academic advancement, children who reside in metropolitan areas without local household registration must take the entrance exam back to their birthplace [4]. Besides, agricultural lands can provide migrants with security when facing recessions. Therefore, it is also important to keep their rural registration status [4]. All around the nation, children who have been left at home have a population more than 61 million, or roughly 20% of all Chinese youngster, with 40% of them under the age of five [5]. The educational growth of the children has been impacted by the parents' extended absences from the family. In other words, a child's education is significantly impacted by the lack of parental involvement in their growth.

With parents as the primary caregivers, the lack of parental companionship for left-behind children seriously affects the psychological development of children, leading to mental health imbalances or

criminal behaviour [4]. Parents who work outside the home often leave their children behind with older family members who do not have the physical strength or knowledge to adequately care for these children [5]. In addition, these family members may not be able to put in as much effort and time as the parents do and may also be lacking in financial support [6].

At the same time, parents who work outside the home are faced with the moral dilemma of whether to work hard to create a better environment for their children or to return to their children and give them the appropriate companionship. Furthermore, since the parents' generation has not had the opportunity to receive sufficient education, they often believe that sending their children to good schools will provide them with the best educational security. The parent generation often feels that working outside the home can provide better educational prospects and living conditions for their children, but this is not the case [7]. Rural communities have relatively limited economic resources and educational opportunities and struggles with psychological growth and mental health in children who are falling behind are constantly ignored. It is estimated that up to 57% of children who are left behind experience various psychological issues. They are involved in 70% of incidents of adolescent delinquency [5].

Although the government has established schools for migrant children and initiated programs to give left-behind children the opportunity to spend their summer vacations in the same cities with their parents. However, the standards of these migrant schools are much lower than those of regular schools [5]. Many children feel very strange when they are with their parents due to the long-term lack of parental companionship during their formative years [8]. In other words, while parents are away from home, the children who are left behind do not receive prompt and proper care, and their socioemotional needs are not addressed. On the other hand, lack of parental support and direction throughout the formative stages of children's lives affects the development of psychological skills, resulting in behavioral and emotional issue as well as interpersonal problems. Lack of parental supervision also leads to a lack of independence and motivation in learning [9]. The lack of academic ability and achievement can also have an impact on the subsequent employment development of left-behind children. In general, parental migration can have many negative effects on children [10]. Although China's Prevention Law states that children under the age of 16 cannot be left alone by their guardians, statistics show that parents who are gone seeking for employment nevertheless leave more than 2 million youngsters at home [9]. All these factors directly affect the development of rural education. Thus, the education of left-behind children should attract sufficient attention from society.

## 2. Literature Review

In China, education has always been regarded as one of the more important stages of life. For rural residents, education through examination is one of the few ways to escape poverty. In other words, if rural household registration candidates do well in their exams and get into a university in the city, they will have the opportunity to upgrade their rural local household registration to an urban registration [4]. Furthermore, in China, good academic performance often means excellent ability. Therefore, having good academic results makes it easier to get a good job and access to good resources in the future. China's education policy requires students to complete nine years of compulsory education and to complete an exam in order to continue their high school education. After completing high school, students have to take another college entrance exam to continue their college education. According to Hu, even under the pressure of strong competition and the education system, rural students do not give up, but the expensive tuition fees are always a problem for them [4]. Many cities have opened residential schools, which are designed to make it easier for students who live far away to come to school. But these boarding schools add to the burden of housing costs for students from rural families. Even if they go on to college, many families face the burden of paying tuition. Moreover, Hu also found that students who have higher expectations for their education tend to have higher self-esteem, self-control, and resistance to negative external influences [4].

According to Shuang et al, left-behind children often live in an environment that is detrimental to psychological development. Because of the limited parent-child relationship with reduced supervision and family control by parents working outside the home, children are prone to poor relationships with their parents [11]. In addition, mobile families often live in marginalised and socially excluded environments, which results in most children from mobile families having to attend informal private schools. Children that are left behind must attend informal private schools, which frequently have inexpensive tuition, if they wish to remain with their parents. These schools typically feature lower class sizes, inexperienced teachers, inadequate learning environments for kids to grow, and inadequate access to health care services. Having parents outside or making children more mobile may increase children's feelings of isolation and belonging. And when children are faced with different and changing circumstances, it can affect the parent-child attachment of children and parents [11].

In their study, Yao Lu shows how rural China's migratory children who are left behind in their home provinces are affected in terms of their educational standing. Instead than focusing on the underlying social and economic mediating elements that influence the impact, the author's major field of investigation is the fundamental influences of parental migration on the education of youngsters who are left behind. Lu noted that parents frequently relocate to provide their children better life prospects. However, the overall impact of parental migration is unclear, as the benefits of the economy and the absence of children and guardians may be counterproductive. Due to the complexity and specificity of the composition of Chinese migrant families, Lu divided the group of children and the migration of different family members into different groups [7]. In the past literature, it has been shown that parental presence in children's growth and development is crucial for children's well-being. In other words, children who grow up in stable families show better outcomes overall than children with more family changes [7]. In Lu's study, they conduct a survey for a total sample size of 885 children from grade 1 to 12. A nationwide representation of the Chinese people is provided by the study's sample population, which is recruited from nine provinces with vastly divergent levels of social and economic development [7]. The study distinguishes the sorts of migration among different families in China and takes into account sophisticated metrics of family migration, such as numerous types of parental and sibling movement. The initial analysis revealed that the overall findings appeared to suggest that the movement of parents had a positive overall influence on children's educational development because of the positive economic support that children receive from their parents working outside. For example, parents' financial support from remittances could be used to support the education costs of children left behind or for other service resources to enhance children's learning. Thus, according to the research, the positive impact of parents working outside should be due to the improved material conditions and living resources that remittances bring [7]. This economic improvement in the household, in turn, increases the quality of the children's education and strengthens the basis of the educational resources for children.

However, the result indicates that this positive impact on children's education is sustained only when family members other than the parents are working outside, such as the migration of older siblings in the family [7]. Many older children in rural families are frequently put to labour outside the home to help pay for the education of the younger children. And children tend to develop better educationally when family members other than parents are working outside the home and can provide financial support. This is because when there is parental supervision, the parents are able to provide adequate supervision or a home environment conducive to learning [7]. At the same time, children whose parents are at home are less likely than those whose parents are outside the home to face additional household workloads and to experience fewer negative emotional and behavioural problems. Issues such as lack of parental supervision, high household labour burdens and negative emotions are significant factors that affect a child's education and learning. The societal costs of family separation due to emigration are considerable and frequently outweigh the possible advantages of migration, even though the overall impact of emigration is not as negative as in the case of other parent-child separation [7]. Overall, based on the research, the families of the children left behind do

not have as positive an impact on the children's education as their parents would like to think. Although for many families, the main purpose of migration and working outside is for the developmental prospects of their children, research shows that financial support does not dilute the negative impact of the lack of parental companionship on children [7].

Left-behind children are now a complex social phenomenon that exists not only in China, but around the world. The absence of parents from work has a substantial influence on the educational and psychological development of children, particularly in disadvantaged communities and households. Moreover, parents who work outside the home also face moral dilemmas. One of the main purposes of working outside the home is to create a better learning and living environment for their children so that they can have a better future. However, the absence of parental supervision places an additional weight on the children who remain in the family, and the buildup of psychological issues prevents the children from developing as smoothly as their parents would want. Lu's study demonstrates, focusing on the mental health of children who are left by their parents in rural area is essential since financial support for parents does not lessen the detrimental consequences of their nonattendance on their childhood development [7].

### 3. Discussion

Families and society must work together to find a solution to the issue of children who are left behind. From the parents' side, there is a need to change the concept of children's education. The corresponding policies can be distributed in rural areas to reduce parents' insistence on giving their children material things and focus on the psychological and educational development of their children. Schools tend to focus on the big picture and ignore the needs of special students like left-behind children. Therefore, it is important to encourage special education spots for kids who are falling behind. Improving teacher quality so that the mental health development of children who are being left behind can be treated seriously. The household registration system has been a significant sociological determinant of how immigrant and native inhabitants are treated. In other words, a major obstacle to the immigrant population and its family members receiving fair treatment is the household registration system. Everyone has a right to equal education; thus, it is important to support the policy that requires children from foreign families to obtain an equal education. In other words, in order to establish an equal education policy, and accelerating the household registration system reform and bridging the gap between urban and rural regions are also of highest importance.

### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, society must pay greater attention to the children that are left behind. For example, the reform of the household registration system should be accelerated so that children can stay with their parents. Increase the investment in rural basic education to achieve equal educational resources. Improve the quality of teachers and strengthen the training of teachers so that they can provide reasonable guidance to children and pay attention to their psychological health. Thus, in order to effectively address the education problems for kids from migrant families, it is necessary for government, society, and educational institutions to work together.

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