

Strategies to Improve the Mental Well-being of the Left-Behind Child

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Abstract. The Left-Behind Children are unable to grow up in a safe environment, which causes some of their mental problems. The phenomenon of them has been a critical social and public health challenge in the world. This essay examines the psychological impacts of this phenomenon on the Left-behind Children, focusing on impaired parent-child attachment and the influence of "deviant" peer groups resulting from a lack of supervision. Utilizing Attachment Theory and the PERMA model of well-being, the study analyzes how the loss of security leads to symptoms of anxiety, depression, and social isolation. To address these challenges, the essay proposes some intervention strategies. School-based methods include multimedia activities, Positive Psychology Interventions such as the 'Three Good Things' exercise and 'Signature Strength' to increase their contact with peers and foster a sense of accomplishment and confidence. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the necessity of high-quality parent-child communication, including daily video calls and collaborative decision-making to increase the security of kids. The essay concludes that the mental well-being of LBC is really important.

1 Introduction

In the villages of China, many people tend to work in city or other countries in order to earn more money to support their families. However, their kids left in the villages, raised by their grandparents or relatives encounter a lot of mental health challenges because of the loss of education and caring; these children are called Left-Behind children. Left-Behind children experience inadequate supervision, emotional nurturing, educational support, proper nutrition, healthcare access, and even basic safety guidance [1]. These factors result in the children's mental problems like depression, anxiety and social isolation. Previous research shows there is a positive correlation between the social support received by Left-Behind children and their mental health, so social support is necessary for them. Otherwise the "left behind" experience can even have a lasting impact on the children after they grow up because parents serve as "safe haven" which is so important during their growing process. This study specifically focuses on the factors including the social context and family condition which affect the children's mental health, the expressions and symptoms of children's mental issues, and the way to improve their mental health. The ways include school-based

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psychoeducational interventions, effective communication at home between parents and children which steers children toward positive peer environments.

2 Reasons

2.1 The symptoms of the left-behind children

The psychological state of left-behind children (LBC) is best understood through a comparative analysis between children who have different related experiences. The findings indicate that the current and previous Left-Behind Children have a higher probability of experiencing serious emotional symptoms—such as loneliness, despair, anxiety, conduct problems and hyperactivity than those who were never left behind. More significantly, the scores among the previous Left-Behind Children are still high, which suggests that the psychological burden of parental migration is a lasting one that does not immediately disappear even when parents come back. The research further highlights significant variances caused by different traits of the children. Girls were found to exhibit more severe emotional symptoms than boys, suggesting that girls have more difficulty internalizing and decreasing the distress of separation. Furthermore, while older students in Grades 9 and 10 had higher levels of hyperactivity, they demonstrated fewer conduct difficulties compared to younger cohorts. These results also showed that a lack of open communication with parents, especially with the mother, would significantly influence the behavioral and emotional development of children. These findings emphasized that the "left-behind" experience creates long-term harm to the children [2].

2.2 Reason analysis

2.2.1 The impact of impaired parent-child attachment on adolescent development

Parents can have a big influence on their kids' mental health, the reason can be explained by "how the kids think" and, subsequently "how the kids act". Attachment Theory describes the developmental impairment of kids when their parents are far away and the physical bond between them is broken. 'Attachment' does not merely refer to "love" or "liking"; rather, it's a lasting psychological connection between humans. The parents are the children's 'Secure Base' and provide the children with more confidence to explore the world. The parents are also the 'Haven' for the children to return to for comfort and relaxation [3]. This theory expresses the idea that parents are not just people who provide material to their children, they are also responsible for regulating their children's emotions and soothing their stress such as the school-related strains, because schools become the most critical environment for them - they spend most of their time at school - with the absence of parents. The primary school strains are academic difficulty and bullying victimization [4]. Therefore, children need to physically get close to their parents in order to ensure they are protected, safe, and relaxed. Without the security, their "attachment system" will be permanently activated or completely shut down [5]. Consequently, the children will be afraid to explore the world, such as making new friends and trying new things, because they require a lot of effort to survive.

2.2.2 The social influence on the children

The psychological development of Left-Behind Children is also profoundly influenced by the environment around the children; it often shifts in the absence of parents' supervision.

Because of the absence of parents, many students will pay more attention to and depend more on the peer group; the peer group transitions from a simple social circle into a powerful "mediating" social force. The 'Social Compliance Theory' states that an individual in a social group will mirror the behaviour of the other group members to feel a sense of belonging [6]. This mirror behavior becomes problematic when the parent-child communication is weak because of the physical distance. These children are more likely to associate with a peer group with "deviant" behaviour, such as drinking, fighting and smoking [6]. Research shows that, in the sample of 1417 adolescents from four middle schools in China, the mean score for deviant behavior among LBC was 1.48, which is significantly higher than the 1.32 mean score for NLBC [4].

Furthermore, the school environment also serves as an influential institutional social force. However, this influence is a double-edged sword. Furthermore, the school environment acts as a critical factor that can inadvertently worsen these outcomes through stigmatization, where left-behind children are regarded by peers or even teachers as "vulnerable" or "problematic." Therefore, their social distance will be increased because they don't know how to treat the LBC correctly [7]. This creates a vicious cycle: The children are isolated in the school, leading them to make friends with the deviant group who can accept them.

3 The ways to improve this situation

3.1 School-based intervention

School-based intervention is an important way to help the Left-Behind children because they spend most of their time staying at school with their teachers and peers. Many Left-Behind children have a sense of being strangers and are unable to blend into the environment well. One of the interventions to help them is to use curriculum-based lessons and multimedia, such as films and music. The school can organize the curriculum-based lessons taught by professional psychology teachers every week, and the school should make sure every student is involved in this class and attach importance to this class. On weekends, the school can show some movies and songs in the school. These movies and songs will attract a lot of students. By giving them the curriculum-based lessons, the students can get valid knowledge and reduce their prejudicial views of the Left-Behind Children. Watching films or listening to the same songs can increase their common topic in order to reduce the social distance and stigmatization that these children often face from their peers [7].

Furthermore, schools can also use Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) to boost the Left-behind Children's mental health. They can organize activities such as 'Three Good Things' every week, which requires the participant to record positive events they experienced systematically in order to train their brain to notice 'pleasure' and 'Engagement' more easily and naturally. This method is especially effective in rural villages because research shows nature can act as a 'positive stimulus that shifts the brain from a state of survival to a state of noticing body and connection, and the activity 'Signature Strengths' also works by letting the Left-Behind children focus on the strengths that are authentic to them [8]. One of the activities the school can organize is letting individuals discover which of the 24 universal character strengths (such as leadership, teamwork, or fairness) are their specific "signature" ones. Teachers should encourage and help the students to find up to seven core strengths [9]. This activity can boost their confidence and help them find a sense of purpose in their school or community. These two ways work because they are both helpful to bolster the five pillars of the PERMA model- Pleasure, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment - which is the multidimensional theory of well-being, thereby reducing the depressive symptoms of the Left-Behind children associated with parental absence [10].

3.2 Parent-child communication

Although the school intervention is important, the parent-child communication still serves as the primary 'safe harbor' for children. Parents can provide the most significant emotional support, which is necessary for the children to combat loneliness and regulate internal distress. Parent-child contacts are necessary for the attachment relationships between them to develop and remain stable, which then allow the children to update the 'internal working model' which is a set of mental rule constructed from experience that provide a framework for both social interaction and the perception of self by making the brain of the children rewire earlier "scripts" of abandonment into new scripts of security [5]. Furthermore, the impact of effectiveness Parent-child communication on the children extends beyond the family unit. The "Mediating Effect" hypothesis states that family communication affects the social lives of the children; it affects the types of friends a child chooses, which then affects their mental health and growth [6]. It works this way because the high-quality communication can make children feel they are equal to other people, and then they dare to make friends with peers who have good grades, work hard, and have dreams. There are some standards for high-quality parent-child communication that will have a positive influence on the children. Firstly, the parents should show their understanding of the feelings of the children. Secondly, parents and children should collaborate to decide children's life together. Thirdly, they should trust each other. Finally, the general tone of their relationships should be positive, with both parties feeling they "get along well". In order to increase the communication time between parents and children, here are some suggestions. Firstly, parents should schedule a specific time each day for a video call. The everyday video call doesn't need to be long; 5 minutes is enough. The parents can proactively ask about the situation of the children or share one happy thing today, to let their children know they really care about them. Secondly, when parents decide anything about their children, they should ask their children's opinion instead of "checking in". For example, when they are buying the gifts for grandma, the parents can ask children for their suggestions about the gift. In this way, children can get the feeling that they are also an important member of this family. These methods are so easy, they will not cost a lot of time or effort, but they really work.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, parental migration is often driven by the necessity of providing superior financial support to the kids. The parental absence creates a significant harm to the children which places left-behind children at a high risk for psychological pressure and deviant behavior. This study demonstrates that the loss of a "secure base" disrupts the child's internal working model, leading to measurable increases in mental health problems. This essay illustrates approach that can decrease the Left-Behind Children's probability to get mental health probability. The approach includes prioritizing high-quality parent-child communication to provide the children a sense of a "safe haven". By making the superficial conversation deeper and collaborative decision-making, parents can help their children feel cared for and safer. Furthermore, the school should start some activities to change the school environment from a potential site of stigmatization into a more comprehensive environment. There are also some scientific strategies, such as the 'Three Good Things' exercise and 'Signature Strengths' interventions, which are effective in improving the five pillars of the PERMA model: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. These Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) are especially effective because they help the children to change their mindset from the "external loss" of a parent to the cultivation of "internal resources," such as leadership, teamwork, and resilience. These strategies can boost the confidence of these kids. Ultimately, improving the mental well-

being of Left-Behind Children depends on creating a consistent, comprehensive and safe environment for them. When schools reduce social distance between non-Left-Behind Children and Left-Behind Children through multimedia activities, empathy-building, and making sure the Left-Behind Children feel secure through high-quality communication between them and parents, the children will prefer to choose healthier and normal peer groups over deviant ones. By integrating these family-based and school-based activities, it can ensure that the "left-behind" experience does not have a negative impact on a children developmental, but rather becomes a period where they develop the independent ability and positive mindset necessary for their future lives.

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