

The wellbeing of left-behind children and migrant children under rural-urban migration in China

As more families in China move to cities for work, many children are either left behind in rural areas or move with their parents to urban areas, facing challenges like limited family support. In 2020, migration affected 138 million children in China: 67 million were left behind, while 71 million migrated with their families, making up nearly half of the country's children. Remarkably, nearly 70% of these children are unable to live with both parents. This dissertation investigates the well-being of left-behind and migrant children in the context of China's large-scale rural-to-urban migration, presenting three studies on the topic.

The first study provides an overview of how parental migration impacts the physical and mental health and educational performance of left-behind children. The Hukou system, which restricts internal movement in China, has left approximately 67 million children without parental care. Reviewing 33 studies, this chapter finds that while financial support from migrant parents offers some benefits, children still experience physical, mental, and educational challenges due to parental absence—especially when both parents, or the mother in particular, are away. This study underscores the need for family and community support and notes that the timing of parental migration can have a significant impact on a child's well-being.

The second study investigates the long-term health impacts of parental migration on left-behind children, using data from the China Family Panel Studies between 2010 and 2018. Results show that although these children's medical expenses increase over time, they don't necessarily experience more illnesses. Interestingly, the rates of overweight children decrease, and non-cognitive skills improve, possibly due to caregiving from grandparents and adjustments in family spending influenced by government policies.

The third study explores how peer parental prejudice against migrant families affects students' academic performance in urban schools. Using data from the China Education Panel Survey, it looks at middle schools where students are randomly placed in classes. Findings reveal that local parents' prejudice toward migrant students can lower academic achievement for both

groups by creating a less inclusive environment. Although no direct impact on mental health was found, the resulting social exclusion and increased discrimination negatively influence the classroom atmosphere, which can still affect students' overall well-being.

Together, these studies highlight the urgent need for effective family and school interventions to support the well-being of left-behind and migrant children.

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