

# The Impact of Family Education on Left-behind Children

Xinlan Wang

Shanghai World Foreign Language Academy, Shanghai, 200000, China

**Abstract:** Nowadays, left-behind children face numerous challenges. Scholars generally point out that the absence of family education is one of the core issues confronting these children. Although existing studies have explored the educational difficulties of left-behind children from various perspectives, most remain at a macro level and lack in-depth analysis of family education on a relatively micro scale. Research has shown that the lack of family education leads to poor academic performance, limited social interactions, and inadequate life skills among left-behind children, highlighting the crucial role family education plays in their development. In light of this, this study proposes strategies and recommendations to improve family education and promote the healthy growth of left-behind children. Moreover, this research addresses the shortcomings of existing literature by conducting in-depth investigations and interviews at the micro level, offering new perspectives and practical approaches to solving the problems faced by left-behind children. Looking ahead, scholars can adopt long-term tracking studies, cross-regional comparisons, and interdisciplinary analyses to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the left-behind children group. This will help build a holistic support system and contribute to coordinated urban-rural development and social equity and justice.

**Keywords:** Left-behind children; Family education; Educational problems.

## 1. Introduction to the Research Question

### (1) Background information

With the acceleration of urbanization in China, there has been a large-scale migration of rural labor to cities, making the issue of left-behind children increasingly prominent.[1]

Family education is a core component in the process of a child's socialization. However, grandparents often serve as primary guardians in families with left-behind children. These guardians generally have lower educational levels and hold traditional views on education, making it difficult to meet the demands of modern educational practices. At the same time, the prolonged separation between parents and children leads to weakened emotional bonds and insufficient parent-child communication, further exacerbating psychological and behavioral issues.[2] Scholars widely agree that the absence of family education is one of the central problems faced by left-behind children.

In Sichuan's rural areas, economic development has lagged behind, resulting in a massive outflow of young and middle-aged laborers. According to 2024 statistics, the number of left-behind children in Sichuan ranks first in the country, reaching as high as 765,000.[3] These children are mainly cared for by their grandparents due to their parents' long-term work away from home, and opportunities for family reunification are limited. In addition, the lack of educational resources in rural areas poses further challenges for left-behind children in terms of academic support and psychological well-being.[4]

The issue of left-behind children in this village is representative of the broader situation in rural Sichuan. It reflects the common conditions faced by left-behind children in the region and helps identify their specific needs. As such, it provides a valuable regional reference for addressing the issue of left-behind children nationwide.

### (2) Significance of the Research

Existing studies mostly rely on large-scale statistical data.

While such data can reveal the general characteristics of left-behind children as a group, it often fails to capture the emotional tensions within individual families and overlooks the complexity of intra-family interactions. Moreover, current research tends to attribute the absence of family education to dysfunctional family structures, with limited attention paid to how urban-rural systems and social institutions affect family education.

From a theoretical perspective, this study integrates family education with the developmental issues of left-behind children, exploring the positive impact of quality family education on emotional support, value formation, and behavioral guidance. It also analyzes the negative consequences that may arise from the absence or inadequacy of family education, such as psychological problems, academic difficulties, and social adaptation challenges. This research not only enriches the theoretical framework of family education but also offers a fresh perspective for the study of left-behind children.

From a practical perspective, this study presents feasible strategies and recommendations based on an investigation and empirical analysis of the current state of family education in Sichuan. For instance, more humane visitation and family reunion policies for migrant workers could be established. In terms of support policies for left-behind children, it is recommended to build a family education guidance service system and implement parent education training programs.

This research holds significant academic value and also offers practical relevance in addressing the social issue of left-behind children in Sichuan. It creates room for improvement in the family education of left-behind children and contributes to their development.

## 2. Literature Review

In recent years, with the large-scale migration of rural laborers to cities, the issue of left-behind children has drawn increasing attention. Research generally agrees that prolonged separation from parents makes left-behind children

vulnerable to challenges in daily care, access to educational resources, and mental health.[5] Although parents' migrant work may improve the family's financial situation, the grandparent caregiving model often lacks adequate supervision capabilities and suffers from intergenerational communication gaps, which negatively affect children's development.[6]

Furthermore, the PRC system of compulsory registration (hukou system) restricts migrant parents from bringing their children to cities for education, exacerbating the structural separation within families. [7] To address this issue, scholars have suggested improving the boarding school system in rural areas, enhancing teacher quality, and introducing community-based childcare services to better support the education and well-being of left-behind children.[8] At the same time, they call on the government to improve relevant policies and promote educational equity and the construction of a comprehensive social support system.

### 3. Research Methods

This study primarily employs interviews and observational methods to collect qualitative data. Through in-depth interviews and participant observation, it focuses on the multidimensional impact of family education on left-behind children, including academic performance, living conditions, and social activities. The research aims to understand the daily lives of left-behind children and their guardians, their approaches to family education, and the challenges they face.

Additionally, the study examines institutional factors, such as the PRC system of compulsory registration and urban-rural resource distribution, to analyze how these structures shape the developmental environment of left-behind children. This perspective contributes to discussions on policy optimization, with the goal of achieving a more equitable allocation of educational resources.

The investigation involved nine left-behind children, ranging in age from second grade in primary school to ninth grade in junior high school, all enrolled at Zhongshi Nine-Year Compulsory Education School. Their parents work long-term in other regions, and the children are cared for by their grandparents.

### 4. The Current Situation of Left-Behind Children and Family Education

#### (1) At the Level of Left-Behind Children

##### 1. Living Conditions

##### Disrupted Daily Routines Due to Family Structure and Living Arrangements

All left-behind children in Shinian Village live with their grandparents, forming relatively simple family structures. Due to limited educational resources in rural areas, many families choose to rent accommodation in nearby towns during the school term to facilitate their children's education. On weekends and holidays, the children return to Shinian Village. This "dual urban-rural" living model somewhat alleviates the educational challenges faced by left-behind children, but also makes their lives more hectic and unstable. As student Z noted:

*"Living in town makes it easier to attend extra classes sometimes. But running back and forth is still tiring, especially since we don't have a car at home, and it's not very convenient."* (20250203Z-SNC)

#### 2. Academic Performance

##### Limited Access to Learning Resources

Due to the significant gap between urban and rural educational resources and the generally poor financial conditions of left-behind families, children often cannot afford supplementary tutoring to catch up academically. While some parents purchase reference materials for their children, the actual usage rate is low. Student K mentioned:

*"I tell my parents about the reference books I need, and they do buy them. But in the end, I don't have time to use them."* (20250202K-SNC)

Additionally, it is difficult for these children to fully utilize online educational resources. The survey showed that most left-behind children perform poorly in school, with English being the weakest subject.

#### 3. Spiritual World

##### Relatively Isolated and Independent

Children in Shinian Village face multiple challenges in emotional expression, cognitive development, and future planning. Emotionally, they tend to appear independent and manage their own emotions, but prolonged emotional suppression can lead to psychological issues. The lack of parental care negatively affects their mental health.

Cognitively, although they access information through new media, their learning is limited by their grandparents' traditional attitudes, and books are underutilized.

In terms of future planning, most left-behind children lack communication with their parents and feel uncertain about the future. However, a few children with strong family support have clear goals, showing that both family education and external resources play a critical role in their development.

#### (2) At the Level of Guardians

##### 1. Guardians' Educational Levels

##### Limited Educational Levels Lead to Traditional Views

In general, the educational background and teaching abilities of left-behind children's parents and grandparents are limited, with most having only completed primary school. Their educational views are relatively traditional, and they face clear limitations in academic tutoring, managing digital devices, and intergenerational communication. These shortcomings not only affect children's academic performance but also their mental health and social skills. However, in daily life education, grandparents often excel—for example, in teaching household chores and encouraging social interactions. Therefore, improving the quality of grandparent caregiving and enhancing external support systems are vital for the healthy development of left-behind children.

##### 2. Case Studies

Despite the widespread issue of inadequate family education, some families have made active efforts to provide sufficient support. For example, W, a ninth-grade student, receives monthly visits from her parents. W's mother said:

*"Every time we come back, W talks to me about what's been going on at school and her recent studies. She tells us what she needs, and we try to meet those needs."* (20250206WM-SNC)

W's parents not only care about her academic performance but also support her interests and overall development. As a result, W consistently ranks among the top three in her grade and actively participates in extracurricular activities.

Another example is J, a sixth-grade student. Although his parents only return home during the Chinese New Year, he maintains close contact with his mother through a smartwatch.

Frequent communication has not only strengthened their emotional bond but also helped J develop confidence and communication skills.

These successful cases show that parental companionship, progressive educational concepts, and frequent parent-child communication are key to improving the quality of family education for left-behind children. In the future, the government and society should strengthen support for these families, encourage parents to seek employment closer to home, and create better conditions for the comprehensive development of left-behind children.

## 5. Analysis of the Impact of Family Education on Various Aspects of Left-Behind Children's Development

### 1. Impact on Mental Health

Mental health is vital for children's overall development, and family education plays a central role in shaping their psychological well-being. Due to the long-term absence of their parents, left-behind children often lack emotional support and psychological care, making them prone to mental health issues. While grandparents can provide for their basic daily needs, they are often limited in their ability to address the children's emotional needs due to outdated educational views and lower educational attainment.

For example, many left-behind children shared in interviews: *"We rarely talk to our grandparents about our inner feelings. Even when we feel confused or stressed, we tend to keep it to ourselves."* (20250206W-SNC)

Prolonged emotional suppression may lead to issues such as depression and anxiety, thereby negatively affecting the children's mental health.

### 2. Impact on Academic Performance

Although left-behind children do not show significant differences in academic adaptability compared to their peers, they tend to struggle with self-confidence and identifying people they can turn to for help. This suggests that their academic difficulties are not necessarily due to a lack of ability, but rather a lack of support and motivation.[9]

Academic achievement is a central task in a child's growth, and family education plays an irreplaceable role in providing that support. However, for the left-behind children in Shinian Village, parental absence and the limited educational abilities of their grandparents present significant challenges in this regard.

For instance, one child shared: *"I can't really use online resources to study, and when I have problems, I don't know who to ask."* (20250202K-SNC)

### 3. Impact on Social Skills

Social skills are a key component of a child's ability to adapt to society, and family education plays a critical role in nurturing these abilities. For left-behind children in Shinian Village, the absence of parental involvement and the often closed-off family environment hinder the development of their social skills.

Many children reported: *"After returning home, I rarely interact with my classmates or friends. My social activities mostly happen at school or at home."* (20250202K-SNC)

Such limited social environments restrict their opportunities to develop interpersonal relationships and social competencies, making them more likely to become introverted, withdrawn, or overly dependent on others.

## 6. Strategies for Improving Family Education and Promoting the Growth of Left-Behind Children

### 1. Family

#### (1) Parent-Child Communication

Parent-child communication is a vital component of family education. For left-behind children, although parents may not be physically present, they can maintain regular contact through modern communication tools such as phone calls and video chats. Parents should actively inquire about their children's studies, lives, and emotional states, listen to their thoughts and needs, and engage in conversations about topics that interest the children (e.g., hobbies, relationships with classmates), rather than focusing solely on academic achievements. This would offer more emotional support and presence for the children.

#### (2) Emotional Support

Emotional support is crucial for the psychological well-being of left-behind children. Parents should express love through words and actions, such as sending gifts during holidays or birthdays, or offering praise and encouragement when their children achieve progress. Additionally, parents can send letters or voice recordings to convey emotional support, helping to mitigate the lack of face-to-face interaction.

#### (3) Grandparent Education Capability

Grandparents often take on the primary role in educating left-behind children, but their educational capacity may be limited. Governments and social organizations can assist by offering training programs to help grandparents understand modern educational philosophies and methods. For instance, organizing family education seminars that teach grandparents how to communicate with children, provide academic assistance, and manage children's behavior would be helpful.

### 2. School

#### (1) Building a School-Family Cooperation Model

Schools should strengthen their communication with the families of left-behind children by establishing platforms for regular interaction. Parents should be able to easily access information regarding their children's academic performance and psychological state. This can be done through regular parent-teacher meetings, home visits, or phone calls.

#### (2) Improving Psychological Counseling Services

Schools should set up counseling rooms and employ professional psychological counselors to provide psychological support to left-behind children. Regular mental health education courses can be held to help students develop skills for managing emotions and handling stress. Establishing psychological files for left-behind children will ensure that any mental health issues are identified and addressed in a timely manner. Group counseling activities can also be organized to help children build healthy interpersonal relationships.

#### (3) Providing Academic Support

Schools can offer academic support to left-behind children through after-school tutoring, study groups, etc. For example, teachers or volunteers can provide free after-school tutoring to help children overcome academic difficulties. Study support groups can be established to encourage students to help each other and improve together.

### 3. Community

#### (1) Leveraging Community Self-Organizing Groups

While the Women's Federation in Shinian Village regularly

visits families to offer support, the overall impact has been limited. Community self-organizing groups (such as Women's Federations and Senior Citizen Associations) can play an important role in caring for left-behind children.[10] For example, these groups can organize community members to offer care and learning support, host neighborhood mutual aid activities to enhance community cohesion, and establish a special fund to provide financial assistance to families in need.

#### **(2) Promoting Resident Participation**

Community governance should consider the growth needs of left-behind children and encourage residents to participate in activities that support these children.[11] This can include organizing community councils to gather opinions and suggestions about the issues concerning left-behind children, and involving local residents in care activities to foster a community-wide focus on these issues.

### **4. Society**

#### **(1) Strengthening Policy Support**

Governments should formulate and improve relevant policies to offer institutional support for left-behind children. Policies that encourage parents to return to their rural homes for work should be introduced to reduce the number of left-behind children. Additionally, greater investment in rural education is necessary to improve the infrastructure and teaching quality of rural schools. Clear laws and regulations should define parental responsibilities regarding child guardianship and education.

#### **(2) Encouraging Return Migration**

The government can encourage migrant workers to return to their rural homes through policy guidance and economic incentives. For example, providing entrepreneurial support and employment training programs can help returnees find suitable jobs in their home regions. Improving rural infrastructure can attract businesses to invest in rural areas, creating more employment opportunities.

#### **(3) Improving Rural Educational Conditions**

Governments should increase investment in rural education to enhance school infrastructure and teaching quality. This includes building boarding schools to provide better learning and living environments for left-behind children, raising the salaries of rural teachers to attract talented educators, and promoting remote education to bridge the gap in educational resources.

#### **(4) Multi-Level Intervention Model**

A comprehensive support network can be established by integrating individual, group, and community work approaches. For example, social workers can organize training sessions for grandparents on child-rearing skills and provide case counseling to improve parent-child communication.[12]

## **7. Conclusion and Discussion**

### **1. Research Conclusion**

This study focuses on left-behind children in Shinian Village, Gufu Town, Fushun County, Zigong City, Sichuan Province, and explores the impact of family education on their development. Through the analysis of their living conditions, academic performance, and emotional well-being, the research finds that due to prolonged parental absence and the limitations of grandparental caregiving, left-behind children experience significant deficiencies in areas such as mental health, emotional support, academic progress, and social skills. However, with the joint efforts of families, schools, communities, and society, it is possible to effectively improve

their educational environment and promote their healthy development.

Specifically, although left-behind children demonstrate relatively strong independence in daily life, their emotional development and social competence are often hindered by an isolated living environment, limited social activities, and the inadequate caregiving and educational support provided by grandparents. Their academic performance tends to lag behind, particularly in subjects such as English, due to a lack of effective academic support and tutoring. Moreover, they tend to be emotionally reserved and experience a significant lack of emotional connection, stemming from limited deep communication with parents, which negatively affects their emotional development and mental health. The absence or insufficiency of family education has led to negative impacts on their mental well-being, emotional growth, behavioral habits, academic achievements, and social capabilities.

### **2. Research Outlook**

#### **(1) Longitudinal Tracking Studies**

Future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to track the growth and development of left-behind children over time, analyzing the dynamic influence of family education. By collecting data at regular intervals, researchers can assess the long-term effects of family education, school education, and social support on these children. For instance, a cohort of left-behind children could be followed from primary school through to the end of middle school, documenting their development at different stages and analyzing changes in family education patterns and their associated impacts.

#### **(2) Cross-Regional Comparisons**

Comparing the family education models and outcomes of left-behind children across different regions could offer valuable insights for policy-making. Given the vast differences in economic development, cultural traditions, and educational resources across China, the growth of left-behind children is affected in diverse ways. Cross-regional studies can reveal both commonalities and regional specificities of these challenges, thereby providing a scientific foundation for the formulation of targeted policies.

#### **(3) Interdisciplinary Research**

The issue of left-behind children intersects with multiple disciplines, including education, psychology, and sociology. Future research should strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration to examine their development mechanisms and support strategies from broader perspectives. Educational theories can inform instructional models, psychology can delve into mental health concerns, and sociology can analyze the impact of family structure, community environment, and social policies. Through interdisciplinary studies, more comprehensive and effective strategies can be proposed to support left-behind children across family, school, community, and societal levels.

## **References**

- [1] Tan, S. (2011). A review of research on rural left-behind children in China. *Social Sciences in China*, (1), 11–12.
- [2] Zhao, M. M. (2012). A study on the impact of parents' migrant work on the mental health of rural left-behind children. *Chinese Health Service Management*, (1), 63.
- [3] Zheng, D. (2024). Synaesthetic experience design of play teaching aids for rural left-behind children based on synaesthetic experience. Sichuan Normal University, 1.

- [4] Chen, A. W. (2025). Research on improving the guardianship system of rural left-behind children. *People's Forum*, (3), 52–55.
- [5] Duan, C. R., & Yang, G. (2008). A study on the situation of left-behind children in rural China. *Population Research*, (3), 24–26.
- [6] Duan, C. R. (2014). Family and school education for rural left-behind children in the context of urbanization. *Peking University Education Review*, (7), 15.
- [7] Fan, S. Z. (2005). Problems and countermeasures in the education of rural "left-behind children". *Journal of the National Academy of Educational Administration*, (Issue not specified), 78–79.
- [8] Hou, J. (2020). Social intervention approaches and models for left-behind families. *Qinghai Social Sciences*, (5), 114–118.
- [9] Fan, S., & Guo, Q. (2015). A review and reflection on the educational issues of rural left-behind children. *Journal of China Agricultural University*, 2, 57-59.
- [10] Chen, A. (2025). *A study on improving the guardianship system for rural left-behind children*. *People's Forum*, (3), 55.
- [11] Yao, Y. (2005). Problems of rural left-behind children and educational responses. *Theory and Practice of Education*, (Issue not specified), 55.
- [12] Hou, J. (2020). *Approaches and models of social intervention in left-behind families*. *Qinghai Social Sciences*, (5), 114.