

Constructing the Rural Mental Health Teachers ‘Team to Care for Children Left Behind

Yan Yan, Aisha Jin

Zhanghe Junior High School, Zhanghe Town, Dongbao District, Jingmen 448156, Hubei, China

Copyright: © 2025 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: In recent years, the education status, living conditions, and psychological conditions of “left-behind children” have attracted people’s attention. They live alone for a long time or with relatives of their grandparents, lack the care of their parents’ care and the warmth of the family, often appear lost, have low self-esteem, are withdrawn, and become a special group. However, the lack of mental health teachers in rural schools forms a grim and sharp contrast with this phenomenon. As a member of the rural teachers, the author analyzed the mental health problems of left-behind children and the construction of mental health teachers in rural schools under the background of positive psychology, and put forward some suggestions combined with the national conditions.

Keywords: Inferiority; Lack; Mental health teacher

Online publication: April 26, 2025

1. The current situation of left-behind children in China

With the continuous development of social structure, the acceleration of urbanization progress, reform and opening up, and the development of market economy, China’s floating population is characterized by large-scale and large-scale flow, and the resulting “floating population children issue” has become the focus of social attention. In addition to those children who follow their parents to study in large construction sites, a considerable number of the children of the remaining migrant population remain in the countryside and become left-behind children. In recent years, more and more “left-behind children” groups, their education, living conditions, psychological conditions, etc., have aroused people’s attention. In 2018, Ni Chunxia, deputy director of the Department of Social Affairs of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, said at the regular press conference of the Ministry of Civil Affairs that as of the end of August 2018, there were 6.97 million rural left-behind children in the country, and compared with the data in 2016, the proportion of rural left-behind children in the compulsory education stage increased from 65.3% to 71.4%. In other words, in one year, China’s left-behind children between the ages of 6 and 15 increased by 418,200. Although the local government has vigorously promoted the work of returning home to start businesses and employment, employment poverty alleviation, and local enrollment of migrant children, it has provided strong policy support for reducing the phenomenon of children left behind at the source. However, the mental health problems caused by the lack of family care for left-behind children cannot be solved by material assistance. From a national statistical point of view, there is not much data on the mental health of left-behind children. According to the author’s search in the “China Journal Full-text Database,” during the 20 years from 1998 to 2018, articles on mental health

problems of left-behind children published by various domestic journals showed an increasing trend. More and more scholars pay attention to the mental health problems of left-behind children, which can be seen that the seriousness and importance of the problem ^[1].

2. Investigation on the basic situation of mental health education in rural schools

Case investigation (Taking Jingmen City, Hubei Province, where the author works as an example). From the perspective of the whole city, Jingmen City has 374,096 primary and secondary school students. According to incomplete statistics, there are 48,679 left-behind students, accounting for 13% of the total number of students. Among them, 26,358 are elementary school students, 16,658 are middle school students, and 5,534 are high school students. In the education of “left-behind children”, the city’s home visiting teachers, 13521, visited 37,337 left-behind students, a rate of visits reached 76.7 percent. In this regard, the author conducted a sample survey of 380 left-behind students in Jingmen City. A survey report was formed on the common characteristics of the student group to make a simple analysis ^[2].

As can be seen from the following sample survey results, 25% of the left-behind children in Jingmen are unhappy or depressed, 8.6% of the students make negative evaluations of themselves, and about 3–4% of the students have serious psychological problems.

3. Statistics and analysis

Table 1. Analysis of mental health data

Number of actual applicants	Average score	Distinction	Difficulty	Reliability	The highest score	Lowest mark
380	73.4	0.58	0.63	0.952	85	34

The full reliability of this paper is 0.95, which is a paper with high reliability and can detect the coefficient of cognitive psychology and learning mental health of students.

Table 2. Statistics and distribution of the number of students in each score section of the school

Non-happy zone					Happy zone			
10–20	20–30	30–40	40–50	50–60	60–70	70–80	80–90	90–100
0	0	15	0	82	89	126	61	7

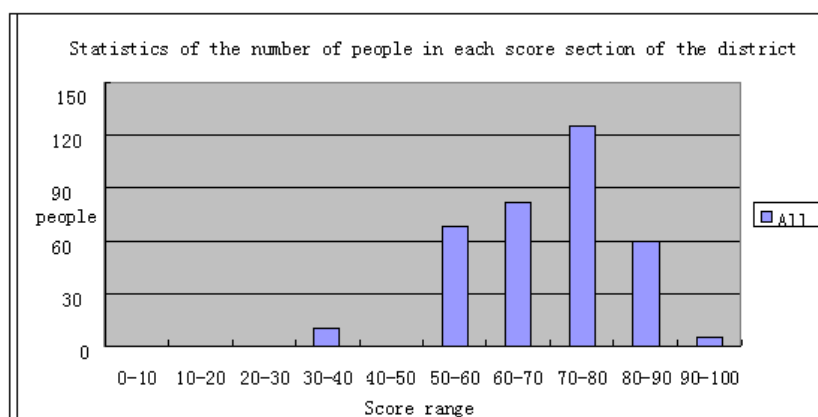


Figure 1. Statistics of the number of people in each score range throughout the district.

In terms of students' psychological quality, 60.5% of students chose to accept criticism. Most students study without goals and lack initiative. According to the survey, 35.2% of students feel that the current study pressure is too much. The survey also shows that family expectations and their own expectations are the main sources of students' learning pressure. Only 6.5% of students believe that the current pressure is due to the expectations of teachers, while 74.1% believe that the current pressure is due to the expectations of families ^[3].

In terms of interpersonal relationships, only 15% of students are very satisfied with the teacher-student relationship, 65% of students are very close to their parents, and 65% of students are very satisfied with the peer relationship. This shows that the distance between students and teachers is too large, showing that students are more willing to share their worries and troubles with classmates, rather than parents or teachers, and don't say anything about their learning if their parents don't ask ^[4].

In terms of frustration, it is preliminarily learned that 18.3% of the students' frustration comes from family changes, such as parents' divorce, parents are not around, 52% of the students think that their frustration is not ideal academic performance. However, due to the high incidence of psychological changes in adolescence, in school due to difficulties and setbacks lead to bad psychological imbalance, self-closure, inferiority, weariness, anxiety, jealousy, hostility, and even runaway from home, puppy love, hatred, suicide, school violence and other out-of-control behaviors occur, more hidden mental health problems have become the focus of social attention ^[5].

4. Network questionnaire survey of mental health teachers in rural schools

- (1) Survey scope: 100 rural teachers from Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong, Shandong, Jiangxi and Inner Mongolia.
- (2) Survey question: Is there a mental health teacher in your school?
- (3) Survey data on the availability of mental health teachers in rural schools

A total of 33.33% of schools have mental health teachers, and 66.67% of schools have no mental health teachers. According to the investigation, the teachers of mental health education are quite weak. Respondents responded that, on the one hand, some schools did not have professional psychology teachers, and some schools did not carry out professional and systematic training and learning for teachers. Second, the relevant mental health education rooms equipped in schools are not working. Third, the development of mental health education in secondary schools is unbalanced in different schools or different classes. Overall, there is a serious shortage of mental health teachers in rural schools ^[6].

5. Interview information on the influence of the family of origin on their beliefs

The author selected samples of middle school students from four different regions as the sample objects. Based on the actual situation, the author took continuous participation in communication as the main means of understanding. Through understanding students' living environment and interpersonal relationships, the author analyzed that when students have psychological problems or even show the tendency of illness, they adopt personal companionship and communication to constantly provide experience and clarify their thoughts. Encourage students to study life and interpersonal enthusiasm. In the spare time of the sample, the author invited students to participate in their hobbies to get more familiar with each other's strengths and thinking patterns, and the relationship between students' attitude and ability to face setbacks and their own experience of home-school educational resources ^[7].

The following content is selected from the experiences of the four students in 2023. The author spent more than two years in continuous contact with the samples, establishing interpersonal relations, and obtaining the trust and effective information of the samples. The specific information has been appropriately modified as follows without affecting the survey results:

- (1) Student A: Female, 13 years old, ISTJ personality, non-only child; He studied in a middle school in a remote rural area of a province. He was educated and cared for by his grandparents since childhood. His father worked in the provincial capital all year round and his mother was seriously ill at home. Junior high school was diagnosed with bipolar disorder because of illness, grades continued to decline; The school has no professional psychological teachers, and the class teacher plays the role of psychological education ^[8].
- (2) Student B: Male, 15 years old, ENFP personality, non-only child; Study in a province key, parents high level of education; Excellent academic performance, high school entrance examination results in the top of the province; Because of the confusion of personal development in adolescence, the relationship with teachers, classmates, parents and other interpersonal conflicts frequently tense, during the epidemic period had suffered from false depression (now recovered), parents did not know, did not take antidepressant drugs; The school is equipped with psychological teachers. After having a dialogue with B student, he did not approve of his ideological attitude.
- (3) Student C: female, 14 years old, ESTP personality, the only child, A junior high school classmate who has some communication with A. After the parents divorced, they live with their mother, who is busy working to provide better living conditions. My academic performance is above average, and I am the commissariat of class psychology. I am optimistic about my future development.
- (4) Student D: Female, 14 years old, INFP personality, only child; Studying in an ordinary middle school in a city, my parents are more tolerant and supportive, and have a certain plan for taking the route of art students after high school; Have a family history of genetic disease, by the doctor's advice; Academic performance is moderate, because of the head teacher's continued harassment of himself and other female students (to a minor degree) of the school resentment; The school has no psychology teacher.

6. Interview conclusions from the perspective of positive psychology

After continuous follow-up investigation with four samples of different origins and similar ages, the author interviewed the samples for many times, summed up the attitude of the samples towards the following questions, and reached the following conclusions ^[9].

6.1. Family and teacher-student relationship

A good and healthy family environment is the support for students to deal more actively with disharmonious factors outside the family. The good guidance given by the mother and the encouragement and supervision of student C have helped student C to establish positive values and learning attitudes during his growth. Student C has formed an independent lifestyle and has certain expectations for a family environment that can better meet personal needs. The positive feedback effect of getting good grades is also deeply motivating. As A member of the psychology committee and A good friend of Student A, Student C can understand the starting point of the teacher's hope that students obey the discipline and study hard, but he cannot agree with the arbitrariness of the education method itself. In the communication and cooperation with classmates, I can initially feel the role of school education in promoting interpersonal communication and teamwork, and recognize the positive significance of school education in learning and socializing, to plan for myself. Student A, on the other hand, cannot adapt to stressful environments, lacks motivation for interpersonal communication, and often feels that he will speculate on normal interpersonal behaviors ^[10].

Similarly, the positive feedback of self-drive given by the family affects campus life, and the negative emotions from peers and teachers in campus life will also affect the communication between family members. Student D can feel love in the words and deeds of parents, but the lack of effective communication in the process makes it difficult for parents to find problems in time. Less interference from parents can give student D a certain choice, but when facing some major choices or difficulties, he does not adapt to seeking guidance and help from parents, which will often lead to a sense of confusion and loss. Teenagers living in families with heavy negative emotions cannot get respect needs respected, there is a great

confusion about the realization of self-meaning, and produce unreasonable fear in interpersonal communication, and are more prone to bullying from peers^[11].

In the face of the future relationship between individuals and homeschool, ACD students maintain a similar attitude. For the negative emotions of teachers and classmates, teenagers generally hope that graduation will open a new interpersonal relationship with high mobility. From the perspective of parents, CD students tend to live alone and keep a certain distance from their parents while fulfilling their duties as children to a greater extent. Student A lacks confidence in his ability to live independently, and expresses the idea that he will return the parenting while considering the external eyes.

6.2. Satisfaction with the home school education

Living in an era of high-speed information, contemporary teenagers receive more diversified influences than their parents, but the process of receiving information is fragmented and the phenomenon of “information cocoon” will cause blind worship of imperfect self-will. Student B agrees with his parents in imparting knowledge and values, but in general, he is dissatisfied with his parents’ conservative educational concept and high requirements, which conflict with his more self-oriented and open way of thinking. Therefore, many students in the middle of the standard of living feel that their parents’ traditional concepts sometimes limit their development, so that they cannot fully explore and try according to their wishes, and they are eager to have more freedom to make independent decisions in the family, hoping that some of their innovative ideas and behaviors can be more inclusive. Similarly, due to the lack of communication with parents, student D could not dialectically treat the problems of poor quality and learning disabilities of a few teachers, and developed excessive resentment towards the current education system, disappointment towards the school and the education system, and a lack of security in school life to some extent affected his grades and way of thinking^[12].

From the perspective of school education, Student B thinks that the teaching method is too rigid, and the teachers prefer students who follow the rules and restrict the students’ ability to exert their own intelligence. The careless attitude of the teachers towards the students further stimulates the rebellious psychology, making the students even more disobedient to the requirements of the teachers and the regular education mode of the school. This situation is usually manifested as two possibilities of inaction or aggressiveness. In this process, the teacher-student relationship produces a vicious circle, and students cannot develop the habit of using strategies and continuous thinking to communicate equally with their superiors.

6.3. Frustration and progress

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a popular personality assessment test based on the “Jungian Eight dimensions”, a theory of psychological types created by Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, and later developed through the research of Katherine Briggs and Isabel Briggs Myers. The theory divides personality into 16 personality types through four directions. In recent years, the test has been widely discussed by teenagers and has become an important part of the process of self-introduction and communication among teenagers.

In the process of talking with the sample, the author found that four students also have a greater or lesser understanding and interest in the MBTI personality test, to use this topic to further understand the students’ views on experiencing setbacks and positive progress. Among them, student B is the most enthusiastic about the topic of MBTI, which is largely due to their behavioral characteristics of “extroversion, intuition, sensibility, and vision.” Teenagers who test ENFP generally feel positive recognition of themselves from this topic. They also feel inspired and honored by historical luminaries (such as Li Bai and Che Guevara) who share the same personality with them, and become a wider group of people who recognize the MBTI. In this process, Student B developed an interest in the “Jung Eight dimensions”, and through the active communication with peers in the community of MBTI enthusiasts, he talked about his depression tendency that was not recognized, and found the balance between “entering the world” and “coming out” to a certain extent, and continued to treat his strengths with a positive attitude after entering the new environment of high school

entrance examination^[13].

From the perspective of MBTI, the above “entering the WTO” and “coming out of the world” are called “S” (Sensing), which focuses on external objects, and “N” (Intuition), which focuses on imagination. Today, China is in a sensing society, and some intuitive people often feel separated and excluded due to a lack of personal positioning. The recognition of MBTI greatly inspires students to recognize their strengths, and to some extent, reduces the sense of shame about what they are not good at. In the process of understanding MBTI, Student D to a certain extent saw in other members of the community who tested INFP (introverted - intuition - sensibility - vision) their artistic creation talent and the explosive power of unremitting pursuit of dreams, to consciously avoid their shortcomings of poor attention and heavy thinking, and make further plans for their future.

The other two students, A and C, who are measured as Sensing, have a more casual attitude towards MBTI and regard the personality test as fun itself. After the student C became interested in the cartoon image of ESTP (extroverted - sense-rational - vision), he consciously shaped his external image according to the positive character elements such as “free and easy” and “extreme words and actions”, which further improved his confidence and positive degree of doing things well. Student A uses “Jungian eight dimensions” as the material to design characters that will make him feel interesting in his spare time, rather than to develop his own character as a solution to anxiety.

6.4. The achievements and deficiencies of current psychological education

With the fast-paced development of society, mental health has become a topic that has attracted much attention from adults and minors. Primary and secondary schools have gradually incorporated mental health education into the curriculum system. Schools with certain resources will hire professional teachers of mental health education and set up special courses and psychological consultation rooms. Community and public institutions gradually carry out mental health services to convey the significance of psychological education in the form of public welfare. The release of the related theme song “Under the Sea,” the online game “Double phase,” and the domestic animation movie “Deep Sea” has made the topic of mental illness more “out of the circle”, which has greatly reduced the shame of teenagers receiving treatment, and made psychological education be paid attention to on a broad level. However, psychological education also faces some problems that cannot be ignored, such as uneven attention and resources, lack of resources in rural and remote areas, and it is difficult for students to access professional psychological education services. Most psychological education practitioners also have the problem of professional quality and skill level to be improved, and cannot meet the growing psychological education needs of teenagers.

The greatest driving force of psychological counseling lies in trust and acceptance. In the process of investigation, the author summarized the failure cases, avoided the preaching and overlooking attitude that caused trauma to students, and encouraged students to speak freely in a way of encouragement and understanding, to address students’ unmet spiritual needs. Student A believes that the formalism of psychological counseling she has received is serious and cannot help her real life, nor can it improve her current situation of being invaded by her parents and having difficulty communicating with her peers. Similarly, in the process of communication with the author, student B expressed the reasons for not recognizing the psychological education level of the school. From the perspective of the communication gap between home and school, teachers are worried that they will accept the blame from parents after taking responsibility, and they will take a “one-size-fit” repressive means to deny students’ negative emotions to a greater extent. From the perspective of identity and experience, such as teachers’ subjective disregard or even scolding of students’ difficulties, will develop into students’ aversion to psychological courses, and they cannot honestly tell their psychological state to psychological teachers, which will increase the psychological burden on students^[14].

However, AB students all believe that the experience of psychological education with different professional levels has certain positive factors, and students can actively understand more professional knowledge through online channels, such as psychoanalysis and other related thought cases, to find suitable solutions for themselves, to find valuable and belonging to the pursuit.

7. Synthesize the conclusion obtained from the above investigation

For a long time, China's urban-rural dual structure system has become the biggest obstacle to solving the problem of agriculture, rural areas, and the problem of left-behind children is also subject to this. The serious psychological problems of left-behind children can not be changed by the improvement of material life. Most of the parents of left-behind children are working outside, they live alone for a long time or live with grandparents and other relatives, lack of parental care and family warmth, often appear lost, have low self-esteem, are withdrawn and exhibit other conditions, manifested as depression psychological symptoms. The lack of family education is also more likely to lead to serious psychological disorders. The shortage of mental health teachers in rural schools has also become a serious problem. In the backward rural schools, there is a shortage of teachers who have the professional knowledge of psychology^[15].

8. Conclusion

Education authorities should complement the policies on building mental health teachers in rural schools and implement them in urban areas. For example, increase the number of psychological teachers, tilt the funding, and strengthen the training and guidance of psychological teachers in rural schools. Increase the learning and training of psychological knowledge and educational concepts for class teachers and substitute teachers, so that they can timely understand and grasp the psychological changes of students, participate in psychological guidance in the teaching process, cooperate with the prevention and intervention work, and improve the pertinency and effectiveness of mental health education. In schools that cannot intervene and solve psychological problems for the time being, the government will purchase psychological services from third-party professional organizations in places where conditions permit. Make full use of off-campus educational resources, and organize relevant public welfare organizations or professionals to carry out educational activities such as mental health Tours in schools. Establish professional mental health education centres in all schools. According to the actual situation such as the number of students and the campus area of each school, professional mental health education centers will be established. Set up a psychological consultation room, a psychological treatment room, student mental health data management room. To facilitate the school students' mental health assessment, psychological counseling, psychological counseling, and the establishment of students' mental health files.

As a rural compulsory teacher, the author has been on the job for six years. In these six years, I saw a fragile and young heart full of trauma. Some children live with their parents for as little as four days a year, have autism, and don't talk to anyone for years. Some children, because their parents work outside and lack family education, violence against classmates, contract a bad habit, repeat teaching, and finally go astray. As a teacher trusted by my classmates, I would often write exchange diaries with my students, in which they would tell me about the dark memories they had experienced that other children did not have. I felt pity, but there was nothing I could do. Based on what I have seen and felt in my work, the author investigates and analyzes the root cause of this phenomenon and puts forward some suggestions on establishing and improving the team of rural mental health teachers, hoping to make a modest contribution to rural education.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Chen X, Xie Y, 2007, Investigation on Problem Behaviors of Left-behind Children in Rural Areas and Family Influencing Factors. *Journal of Inner Mongolia Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2007(1): 29–33.
- [2] Ye F, 2006, Research on Psychological Problems and Countermeasures of Rural Left-behind Children. *Neijiang Science*

and Technology, 2006(3): 77.

- [3] Feng J, Luo H, 2005, Rethinking the Education of “Left-behind Children”. Journal of Guangdong University of Education, 2005(2): 39–41 + 60.
- [4] Xiong Y, 2007, Discussion on the Education of Rural Left-behind Children from the Perspective of Public Policy. Jiangxi Education and Research, 2007(1): 85–86.
- [5] Yang Y, Hu P, Guo X, et al., 2012, Research on the Relationship Between Psychological Congruence, Peer Attachment and Mental Health of Left-behind Children. China Special Education, 2012(7): 87–91 + 60.
- [6] Song Y, Liang J, Ren Z, et al., 2012, Research on Sustainable Development Model of Mental and Physical Health of Left-behind Children in Western Rural Areas: A Case Study of Left-behind Children in Chongqing. China Sports Science and Technology, 2012(5): 100–108.
- [7] Deng C, 2012, Socialization Dilemma of Rural Left-behind Children and Countermeasures of School Education: Investigation and Practice of R City in Southern Zhejiang Province. Social Sciences of Zhejiang, 2012(5): 78–85.
- [8] Zhao M, Li H, Li J, et al., 2012, Study on the Influence of Parents’ Migrant Work on the Mental Health of Left-behind Children in Rural Areas. China Health Service Management, 2012(1): 60–63.
- [9] Zheng L, Wu Y, 2014, The Impact of Labor Migration on the Educational Development of Left-behind Children in Rural Areas: Evidence from a Survey in Western Rural Areas. Journal of Beijing Normal University (Social Science Edition), 2014(2): 139–146.
- [10] Duan C, Lv L, Wang Z, 2014, Family Education and School Education of Rural Left-behind Children in the Context of Urbanization. Education Review of Peking University, 2014(3): 13–29 + 188–189.
- [11] Ren Q, Tang Q, 2014, A Study on the Emotional Health of Left-behind Children in China. Education Review of Peking University, 2014(3): 30–49 + 189.
- [12] Chen J, Fan X, Cheng X, et al., 2014, Family Function and Problem Behavior of Rural Left-behind Children: The Mediating Role of Self-control. Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology, 2014(2): 319–323.
- [13] Zhao J, 2013, Caregiver Behavior Monitoring and Loneliness and Antisocial Behavior of Rural Left-behind Children. Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology, 2013(3): 500–504.
- [14] Analysis of Gender Differences in Mental Health Status of Rural “Left-behind Children.” Journal of Psychiatry, 2007(1): 11–13.
- [15] Liu X, Yang Y, Ha L, et al., 2012, Research on the Relationship Between Emotional Problem Behavior and Social Support of Left-behind Children. Chinese General Medicine, 2012(28): 3287–3290.

Publisher’s note

Whioce Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.