

FORMER CHINESE “LEFT BEHIND CHILDREN” AS CURRENT ACTORS OF PARENTAL LABOUR: OPINIONS ON SATISFACTION WITH PARENTAL LABOUR

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Abstract

Assessing satisfaction with parental labour plays an important role in cultivating children's human capital. The purpose of research is to study of opinions on satisfaction of actors of parental labour with experience of “left behind children” in China based on a 2021 social survey in Sichuan, China (n=637). We used non-parametric statistics (Mann–Whitney U-test) and correlation analysis. Our results are as follows: respondents who were “left behind children” are general less satisfied with parental labour than those without such experience; as the satisfaction of respondents who were “left behind children” with the current family's parent-child intimacy increases, so does their satisfaction with the current family integrity, the higher satisfaction with the primary family integrity, the higher satisfaction with family integrity and the current family's parent-child intimacy; the respondents who were “left behind children” with migration experience are more satisfied with their current family's parent-child intimacy and primary family's integrity; as the time of experience of “left behind children” increases, the respondents are less satisfied with the integrity of the primary family; the majority of respondents with the lengths of experience of “left behind children” for 1-5 years have lower satisfaction with integrity of the primary family.

Key words: “left behind children”, parental labour, satisfaction, China

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Introduction

Parental labour is a way of regulating the population that may help motivate the quantity and quality of the population in the future (Ross-Plourde, 2019; Bagirova, 2017). However, based on recent research results, it is not difficult to find that the process of cultivating children's human capital, satisfaction of parental labour often affects its effectiveness. (Greenlee, 2022; Nahkur, 2022; Chen, 2022). Different social groups may have different opinions on the satisfaction of parental labour due to different growth experiences, family environments, and educational levels. “Left behind children” in China are seen as a unique phenomenon that

emerged during the country's socio-economic transition (Xiang, 2007; ling et al., 2008). This phenomenon is due to the disparity between urban and rural areas in China, where labour from rural areas migrates to cities, while rural children cannot migrate with their parents, resulting in children being under the care of grandparents, relatives, or friends for a long time. Over the years, researchers have paid more attention to the phenomenon of “left behind children”. In recent years, they have gradually paid attention to them as adults, mainly including personal income (Quan et al., 2022), human capital (Xiao et al., 2022), and professional work (Pan, 2018). However, little research has been done on “left-behind children” becoming parents in adulthood. Understanding the opinions on the satisfaction of actors of parental labour with experience of “left behind children”, it is possible to analyse the potential of this group to develop their children's human capital in a more targeted way, to find countermeasures to stimulate the demographic reproduction of this social group.

In this study, satisfaction with parental labour is studied through satisfaction with the interaction of actors of parental labour with children in different periods of its implementation - in the primary family (when the respondents were children themselves) and in the current family (when the respondents are actors of parental labour).

The purpose of our paper is to reveal opinions of satisfaction of actors of parental labour with experience of “left behind children”.

1 Data and Methods

In 2021 we used questionnaires and personal in-depth interviews with two types of parents - those with experiences “left-behind children” (n=431) and those without (n=206) in Sichuan. Sichuan is the most representative Chinese province for the study of the phenomenon of “Left behind children”.

A comparative analysis of satisfaction with parental labour in different types of actors of parental labour was carried out using the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U-test. Correlation analysis can help us understand the relationship between the acquired variables of satisfaction and sociodemographic variables. We assessed two aspects of satisfaction of parental labour - satisfaction with family integrity and satisfaction with parent-child intimacy.

2 Results

1. Table 1 shows that there is no significant difference in satisfaction with parental labour in

one case related to the primary family - in the assessment of satisfaction with the parent-child intimacy ($p=0.790$).

Tab. 1: Statistical differences in assessments of satisfaction with parental labour in two types of families in two categories of respondents - with experience of “Left behind children” and without (Mann-Whitney U-test)

Satisfaction of actors of parental labour				
Indicators	In the current family		In the primary family	
	family integrity	parent-child intimacy	family integrity	parent-child intimacy
Mann-Whitney U	39153.000	40035.000	38558.000	43842.500
Wilcoxon W	132249.000	133131.000	131654.000	136938.500
Z	-2.579	-2.184	-2.849	-.267
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.010	0.029	0.004	0.790

Source: Authors' Calculations

Therefore, regardless of whether the respondents are actors of parental labour with experience of “left behind children” or not, this does not affect their satisfaction with parent-child intimacy in relation to the families in which they grew up. At the same time, other aspects of satisfaction with parental labour differ significantly.

2. Table 2 shows that respondents with experience of “left behind children” are less satisfied with the integrity of their current family, parent-child intimacy, and integrity of their primary family than those without such experience.

Tab. 2: Comparison of differences in satisfaction with parental labour in two types of actors of parental labour

Satisfaction with parental labour	Type of respondents - parents							
	Group with experience of “left behind children”				Group without experience of “left behind children”			
	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Deviation
In the current family								
Family integrity	4.00	4.00	5	1.099	4.30	4.00	5	0.781
Parent-child intimacy	3.95	4.00	4	1.105	4.25	4.00	4	0.664

In the primary family								
Family integrity	3.88	4.00	4	1.118	4.18	4.00	5	0.873

Source: Authors' Calculations

In our opinion, this may be the difference caused by the experience of “left behind children”. This can be explained by the following reasons.

First, respondents with this experience were unable to live with their parents during childhood, which may have led to respondents' lower satisfaction with the family integrity of their primary family. Here is a statement from our informant:

“My parents went to work in other cities, and I could only live with my grandparents. Although my grandparents took good care of my life, in my heart they still couldn't replace my parents.” (Female, 29 years old, with experience of “left behind children”)

Second, a Chinese study shows that the impact of “left behind children” not only has short-term effects, but also long-term effects (such as, future marriage concepts, family relationships, fertility attitudes, etc. for this type of child) (Wang, 2021), which may lead respondents to satisfaction with the family integrity is low of the current family.

Third, the parent-child relationship has an intergenerational transmission effect (Augustijn, 2022). With the extension of the time of being a “left behind children”, respondents with this experience become more and more estranged from their parents, gradually reducing the intimacy of the parent-child intimacy, which may lead to the respondents' low satisfaction with the parent-child intimacy of the current family. Here is a statement from our informant:

“...I feel that my relationship with my parents is not too close. At that time, there was no video when we communicated, only occasional phone calls, nothing to talk about... Now my children have grown up, and gradually have their own ideas, there is not much communication between us, I don't know how to communicate with them” (Female, 40 years old, with experience of “left behind children”)

3. In order to further understand the characteristics of satisfaction with parental labour of respondents who were “left behind children”, we revealed significant correlation between migration experience and length of experience of “left behind children” in their primary family and their satisfaction with parental labour. (Table 3).

Tab. 3: Relationship between sociodemographic characteristics of respondents - parents with experience of “left behind children” and satisfaction (method: Spearman)

Variables		Family integrity of the current family	Parent-child intimacy of the current family	Family integrity of the primary family
Parent-child intimacy of the current family	Correlation Coefficient	0.524**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		
Family integrity of the primary family	Correlation Coefficient	0.398**	0.370**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	
Migration experience	Correlation Coefficient	0.087	0.119*	0.107*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.072	0.014	0.027
length of experience of “left behind children”	Correlation Coefficient	-0.078	-0.027	-0.148
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.105	0.569	0.002

Source: Authors' Calculations. **, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*, Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results show that the satisfaction with parental labour on respondents-parents with experience of “left behind children” are related to the following characteristic: as the respondents' satisfaction with the parent-child intimacy of the current family increases, so does their satisfaction with the current family integrity; the higher satisfaction with the primary family integrity, the higher satisfaction with the family integrity and the parent-child intimacy of the current family; the respondents with migration experience are more satisfied with their current family's parent-child intimacy and primary family's integrity; as the time of experience of “left behind children” increases, the respondents are less satisfied with the family integrity of the primary family.

4. In addition, we hypothesized that the difference in the length of experience of “left behind children” may predetermine the opinions of the satisfaction with the parent-child intimacy of the current family and family integrity of the primary family among actors of parental labour who were previously “left behind children”. To test this hypothesis, we analysed the differences in these two satisfactions with parental labour for respondents with different lengths of experience of “left behind children” using the Kruskal-Wallis’s test. The comparison results are shown in table 4.

Tab. 4: Assessing the opinions of the satisfaction with parental labour among respondents with different lengths of experience of “left behind children” (method: Kruskal-Wallis)

The satisfaction of actors of parental labor	Kruskal-Wallis H	df.	Asymp. Sig.
Parent-child intimacy of the current family	6.434	4	0.169
Family integrity of the primary family	11.987	4	0.017

Source: Authors' Calculations.

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference in one case - in relation to the satisfaction of actors of parental labour of current family, which we designated as “parent-child intimacy” ($p = 0.169$). Consequently, the lengths of experience of “left behind children” does not affect the opinions on satisfaction with parent-child intimacy of the current family of respondents who were previously “left behind children”. The differences among the lengths of experience of “left behind children” of parents surveyed in terms of the satisfaction with family integrity of the primary family are significant.

5. To verify in more detail the difference between the lengths of experience of “left behind children” and the satisfaction with the integrity of the primary family, we conducted the following detailed analysis. Table 5 shows that the chi-squared significance is less than 0.05 - thus, the relationship between these variables is not random; at the same time, the value of Cramer's coefficient shows the weakness of the relationship.

Tab. 5: Correlation analysis between the lengths of experience of “left behind children” and the satisfaction with the integrity of the primary family

	Pearson Chi-Square	Likelihood Ratio	Linear-by-Linear Association	Phi	Cramer's V
Value	37.998 ^a	40.260	6.885	0.297	0.148
Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	0.002	0.001	0.009	0.002	0.002

Source: Authors' Calculations. 4 cells (16.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.46.

6. In addition, Table 6 shows that, the majority of respondents with the lengths of experience of “left behind children” for 1-5 years have lower satisfaction with integrity of the primary family.

Tab. 6: Statistical analysis of the relationship between the lengths of experience of “left behind children” and the satisfaction with the integrity of the primary family

Family integrity of the primary family						
Lengths of experience of “left behind children”	Completely dissatisfied	Not satisfied	I don't know	Satisfied	Completely satisfied	Total
Less than 1 year	5.0% ^a	9.8% ^a	9.1% ^a	21.2% ^a	24.1% ^a	18.80%
1–3 years	35.0%^a	26.8% ^a	25.5% ^a	23.5% ^a	28.3% ^a	26.20%
3–5 years	45.0%^a	17.1% ^a	18.2% ^a	27.6% ^a	19.3% ^a	23.40%
5–8 years	15.0% ^a	17.1% ^a	9.1% ^a	11.2% ^a	13.1% ^a	12.30%
Over 8 years		29.3% ^{a, b}	38.2% ^b	16.5% ^a	15.2% ^a	19.30%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Authors’ Calculations. Each subscript letter denotes a subset of Y5 categories whose column proportions do not differ significantly from each other at the .05 level.

Conclusion

We obtained the following results: the respondents with experience of “left behind children” are less satisfied with the integrity of their current family, parent-child intimacy, and integrity of their primary family than those without such experience; as the satisfaction of respondents with experience of “left behind children” with the parent-child intimacy of the current family increases, so does their satisfaction with the current family integrity, the higher satisfaction with the primary family integrity, the higher satisfaction with family integrity and the parent-child intimacy of the current family; the respondents with experience of “left behind children” with migration experience are more satisfied with their current family's parent-child intimacy and primary family's integrity; as the time of experience of “left behind children” increases, the respondents are less satisfied with the family integrity of the primary family; the majority of respondents with the lengths of experience of “left behind children” for 1-5 years have lower satisfaction with integrity of the primary family.

The persistently low fertility rate has made today's China pay more attention to the quality of human capital, which in turn offers the possibility of acknowledging the parental labour. This study, by analysing the family satisfaction of parents who with experience of “left behind children”, increasing their family integrity and the intimacy between parents and children may play a role in motivating the effectiveness of parents and potential parents in nurturing children's human capital. The obtained results more fully reflect the opinions of actors of parental labour who with experience of “left behind children” in China on the issue

of developing their children's human capital, which in turn could strengthen empirical evidence for management decisions in the field of population policy in certain regions of China - especially It is a province with more numbers of “left behind children” such as Sichuan.

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