

# Returning-Migrant-Worker-and-Children-Relationship Reconstruction Strategies from the Perspective of Parental Education

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**Abstract:** Under the background of the Rural Revitalization Strategy, working parents are increasingly returning home to their left-behind children. However, long separation has caused alienation of the parent-child relationship. To enable returning parents to reconstruct the parent-child relationship with their family children, we now propose corresponding solutions based on parental education theory from the subjects of parents, society, and government, to protect the growth of children and reconstruct the parent-child relationship.

**Keywords:** Parental education, Returning rural migrant workers, Reconstruction of parentage relationship

## 1. Introduction

According to the report<sup>[1]</sup> made by the Chinese government in 2020, the total number of migrant workers in the country in 2020 was 288.36 million, whose growth rate dropped by 1.1% compared to 2019. 172.66 million farmers are working locally in rural areas, an increase of 0.9% from 2019. Meanwhile, there are 135.06 million migrant workers moved to cities in 2020, the total number of migrant workers in the country in 2020 was 288.36 million, whose growth rate dropped by 1.1% compared to 2019. 172.66 million farmers are working locally in rural areas, an increase, decreasing by 1.5% compared with 2019. China Statistical Yearbook<sup>[2]</sup> revealed the fact that in 2020, nearly 520 million rural migrant workers returned hometowns and started their businesses. And thus, generally, the number of people employed locally within the countryside and migrant workers returning to their hometowns to start their businesses are rising. The returning group contains a considerable number of parents of left-behind children, indicating the fact that parents will have more opportunities to reunite with their left-behind children after returning to their hometowns. Theoretically, this can fill the absence of a parental role, and reconstruct parental relationships, leveraging the children's physical and mental health development. However, due to the low education quality of returning parents, conservative thinking, backward education concept, lack of scientific education concept, simple education methods, and other reasons. How to reconstruct the parent-child relationship, strengthen parent-child interaction and establish a trusting relationship with children in the family has become a critical problem.

## 2. Status of Left-Behind Children

Some scholars have done a study on "Does leaving children behind in the family lead to parent-child alienation", and the experiment showed that when the mother or both parents were away from home, the effect of leaving children behind on the relationship between children and their parents was significant negative effect, and the longer the negative effect, the more significant.<sup>[3]</sup> Long-term separation of rural left-behind children from their parents leads to a lack of emotional care, long-term and continuous communication with parents, and a gradual fading of affection, which leads to some problems in varying degrees in the emotional, psychological, moral and academic aspects of rural left-behind children. They tend to have low self-esteem and lack trust in their parents' affection. The objective reality of long-term separation from parents causes a lack of communication and interaction between left-behind children and their parents, which prevents them from establishing good trust and forming emotional ties like parents and children in normal families, and to a certain extent alienates the parent-child relationship, leading to the following problems among left-behind children.

Above all, in the perspective of mental health, due to the separation of the parent-child relationship, left-behind children tend to strongly miss their outgoing parents, communicate less with their guardians, resulting in introversion, self-abasement, social phobia, even distorted minds like hatred, violent tendencies which may happen on some children. Researchers like Pan Lu and Ye Jingzhong have shown that the mental health problems of left-behind children increase as the time spent apart from their parents increases.

Secondly, in interpersonal interaction, left-behind children's moral values and behaviors are prone to be negatively affected due to the lack of family education coupled with the indulgence of their guardians. When encountering problems, they are more likely to solve them in a direct and venting way than non-left-behind children. Meanwhile, left-behind children lack affectionate and attentive care due to the absence of their parents, resulting in children who may be ridiculed and snubbed by other students at school and gradually become inferior, reluctant to communicate with others, and closed to themselves.

Finally, attendees at the Seminar on Support Actions for Left-behind Children in Rural China reported that parents going out to work can help children live independently. Many left-behind children can cook, wash dishes, and do laundry at a very young age. However, non-negligibly, the juvenile period is a critical stage when children need to be cared for and looked after by parents. Due to the absence of parents and their protection, children are at a higher risk of personal safety violations. Many unintentional injuries to children in society happened in the last few years. For instance, 192 cases of sexual abuse of girls were reported from 2013 to 2014.

The return of migrant working parents provides an important prerequisite for alleviating parent-child estrangement, enhancing parent-child relationships, rebuilding trust relationships, and promoting the healthy growth of left-behind children. However, due to the low education level and backward education concept of outgoing parents, they cannot provide appropriate education methods. Some parents are obedient to their children due to their inner guilty. While some parents care only about children's grades and physical health, neglecting their mental development. Also, some parents regard themselves as the authority of their children, regarding children as their vassals, suppressing and disciplining children, acting as the role punisher and disciplinarian. Some parents even think the growth of children is predestined and only ensures children's daily life. All the listed education methods are inappropriate, even causing deterioration of the parent-children relationship, harming the physical and mental development of left-behind children.

Therefore, here we provide suggestions and strategies to facilitate the reconstruction of the parent-child relationship between returning migrant working parents and left-behind children from the perspective of parenting education.

### **3. Solutions**

#### ***3.1. Governmental Level***

First of all, many countries around the world have issued relevant legal documents and policies on parenting education. However, in mainland China, parents have a vague understanding of parenting education or even no such concept. The government can introduce laws and policies related to parenting education, increase its publicity, and provide policy support for its development and implementation of it. Although China issued the Law on the Promotion of Family Education in 2021, which clarifies the responsibility of family education, provides support for the implementation of family education, and provides a legal guarantee for the physical and mental development of children, we have to admit that the law is too macro. The laws related to parenting education can provide direction and show the way for parents in family education<sup>[4]</sup>.

Secondly, the Outline of China's Child Development (2011-2020) proposes that family education guidance services need to be included in the urban and rural public service system. Building an urban and rural public service system is a governmental action, which in turn makes it clear that the government also needs to take responsibility for building an educational guidance service system, and that the government is responsible for carrying out planning, input, and other work and purchasing the services.<sup>[5]</sup> However, temporarily, the proper role of government departments has not been fully played, but the Women's Federation plays a role in promoting various things such as family education. The promotion and development of parenting education need to be improved, and the law needs to be enforced. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the investment of human and financial resources in parenting education, and establish a sound parenting education service system, meeting the needs of parents for

family education.

### **3.2. Social Level**

The publicity of parenting education should be increased. Social organizations and educational scholars can utilize modern information technology, with the special characteristics of returning parents considered, promote parental education knowledge to returning parents through network broadcast, online lectures. Additionally, websites and APPs can be developed for parenting education, breaking the limitation of time and space, and facilitating the knowledge acquisition of parental education for parents. Also, set up an online forum for parents to solve their confusion and uncertainty. Finally, social organizations, students, and scholars of education can go to rural areas with a large number of returning parents during the holidays to carry out offline activities like family life, education, parent-child activities, helping parents to have a deeper understanding of children's growth and improve the parent-child relationship, clarify their roles, change their education philosophy and improve their educational ability. Conducting offline surveys can help organizations and scholars have a more realistic understanding of the parent-child relationship between migrant parents and children.

### **3.3. Returning Parents' Level**

Social work intervention alone cannot fundamentally solve the problem of parent-child alienation. Parents are important subjects in reconstructing the parent-child relationship. However, returning parents are generally poorly educated, have poor self-learning ability, and their education and communication methods for children are not effective enough. For example, they pay too much attention to children's learning achievements and neglect correct demonstration and guidance in children's learning. Neglecting children's psychological needs and health, focusing only on physical health and thus, increasing the alienation between parents and children without being able to reconstruct the parent-child relationship. At this point, parental education is very important and necessary. Parents should keep in mind that they are the important subject of the parent-child relationship, and constantly improve their family education, to protect the healthy growth of children.

First of all, parents should establish the correct education concept and education method through parental education. Through various ways to make up for the alienation of communication, interaction, and emotional expression between parents and children caused by the long-term separation. Secondly, parents should make it clear that children's learning and growth are not only about communicating with teachers at school about children's school attendance, homework completion, and interpersonal relationships, but also about children's current difficulties and needs and discussing appropriate strategies to solve them. According to Noddings' ethics of care, parents should understand the child's reasonable needs, positively communicate with the child, provide the child with relationship and care, and work with the child to solve problems together to help reconstruct the parent-child relationship. In addition, parents should strengthen their self-learning ability, identify the most "serious conflicts" between parents and children according to their situation, and enrich their knowledge base by using various rich resources available on the Internet to lay a good foundation for achieving parent-child relationship reconstruction.

## **4. Conclusions**

In this thesis, we established a general overview on the status of the relationship between left-behind children and returning migrant working parents based on statistics and real world examples. We have applied education theories in analysing the existing problems. Also, some suggestions are proposed from the aspects of government, society, and parent from the perspective of parental education.

## **References**

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