

Internal migration and child victimisation in China - The impact of parental migration on psychological wellbeing, health behaviors and injury prevalence among left-behind children in rural China

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Mengtong Chen, Xiaoyue Sun, Edward Chan (The University of Hong Kong)*

Objectives

Children left behind in rural China are reported to be at increased risk of injury, emotional and behavioral problems, yet quantitative syntheses of studies about left-behind children are rare. We undertook a meta-analysis to examine the impact of parental migration on left-behind children's psychological wellbeing, health behaviors and the prevalence of injury.

Method

We searched 11 databases to identify studies published in English or Chinese after 1979 when China started its economic reform, reporting developmental and educational problems among children affected by parents' rural-to-urban migration. In the present study we included only empirical studies reporting left-behind children.

Results

Forty-eight studies were finally selected from 1387 studies. Odds ratio for pooled risk estimates for combined beneficial outcomes was 0.7 (95% CI 0.488-0.683), which means compared to non-left-behind children, targeted children are less likely to be satisfied with life and schooling (OR=0.811), have less attachment to parents, teachers and peers (OR=0.742), get less social support (OR=0.226) and have lower self-concept, etc. Odds ratios for pooled risk estimates was 1.295 (1.122, 1.494) for behavior problems, 1.88 (1.372, 2.576) for depression and anxiety and 1.833 (1.361-2.469) for loneliness. Left-behind children have more chances to get injured or abused (OR=2.093) compared to non-left-behind ones.

Conclusion

Left-behind children are at a higher risk of injury, depression, loneliness and behavior problem and have difficulty in developing positive attitude towards schooling, parent-child relationship, life and themselves. Policy and intervention is urgently needed to help this huge group of children who are in lack of care, protection and guidance.