

## The Causes of Left-Behind Women's Life Difficulties in Rural China

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**Abstract:** Since the 1980s, along with the reform of the rural household contract responsibility system as the main propulsion and the start of the economic system reform, towns in rural area of light years of surplus labor began to flow to the town, from the Midwest economically underdeveloped areas flow phase. In terms of gender, the floating population is mainly composed of male rather than female. The rural population flowing into cities is dominated by males (both unmarried and married) and unmarried women, while married women mostly remain in rural families. In the essay, the married women who go to cities to work or do business and stay in the countryside are called left-behind women.

**Keywords:** Left-behind women; life difficulties; reasons.

### INTRODUCTION

The migration and development literature increasingly interrogates the effects of emigration on sociocultural change in the countries of origin, especially in relation to gender relations [1].

#### Research Background at home

Concern has been growing recently in China about the well-being of children, women and the elderly “left behind” on the farm when family members leave the village in search of waged work [2]. Among them, left-behind women are the most characteristic and contradictory group. Among them, left-behind women are the most characteristic and contradictory group.

Domestic research on rural left-behind women generally includes research on the causes of left-behind, living conditions, their construction of new countryside, the way improving the living level, the method solving the problems of life and so on. For example, Liu Jinying claimed that Left-behind women in rural areas generally suffered from high psychological pressure, high labor intensity, poor physical condition, monotonous spiritual entertainment and other questions. Especially in the face of the frequent absence of their husbands, they feel strong sense of loneliness and are lack of sense of safety. From the aspect of their rights and benefits, their basic safety can not be guaranteed because of the absence of men in the countryside. From the aspect of marriage and family, they are faced with entirely different environment, culture and life attitude, which can influence the relationship between them. And Lu Danping believed that there were many factors restricting left-behind women's investment in rural construction—social factors, cultural factors and individual factors.

#### Research Background Abroad

The left-behind women in rural China phenomenon is Chinese special phenomenon, which mainly appeared since 1980s. So the researches abroad are very few. Researches abroad are mainly about the influence towards women whose husbands go out to earn money. And the researches mainly focus on South American countries like Mexico, Southeast Asian countries, South African countries and so on. Susan Mann [3] investigated the social gender relationship in the lower reaches of Yangtze River. There were also other scholars believed wives of migrants are not ‘left-behind

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women' as reported in other countries when husbands migrate. Rather, wives of migrating husbands report a higher level of satisfaction with economic resources and no greater physical or mental health problems relative to those in non-migrant relationships [4]. It was said that in poor rice-farming households that depend primarily upon their own labor for farming face significant constraints on production that push members to migrate. Out-migration could have effects on agricultural production and household welfare [5]. We find that male out-migration has forced women to take on labour tasks that are associated with new spatial and mobility patterns. While these patterns have potential for increased empowerment for women, they also call the women's morality into question, resulting in a policing of the women's behaviour, and a simultaneous restriction of their mobility, by themselves and others [6].

## **SOCIAL REASONS**

### **Traditional Gender Roles**

Gender roles is the earliest way of human division of labor, which can be manifested as the gender difference of labor content between male and female. Actually, since traditional Chinese society period, "men go out and women stay at home" —an ideal gender roles mode has appeared and gradually accepted by people. However, on the basis of the unequal division of labor, male and female are confronted with two entirely different situations, which makes a massive difference in means of production and power distribution. But the phenomenon was ignored by people for a long time, which brought a series of problem, such as low authority, low sense of worth and so on.

The gender roles makes women restricted to the areas they live in so that they have no opportunity to reach out to other areas to broaden their horizons. For some women, they are satisfied with current situation, which makes them strongly dependent on their husbands in economy. The dependence makes them have no right of speech when some bad things happened to them, such as divorce. For some self-conscious women, they refuse to be the belongings of men. But from the aspect of society and policy of the law, they can not gain enough support to realize the equality. In a word, the traditional gender roles mode brings massive influence and harm to female.

### **Impractical Help from Social Organization**

Indeed, problems happen to left-behind women in rural China raise concerns and support of many social organizations. But for some rural areas, due to the limitation of economic level, the approval rating of social organization is low, which means they can not provide helpful and timely help for women to solve all kinds of problems. Some of the organizations can only provide one or two methods which are impractical help for them. Purpose specific medical and living conditions in rural China may predispose people there to a poor quality of life [7].

And meanwhile, the social support and training opportunities are very limited in rural areas. Government and local women's associations pay no attention to their self-development and realization of self-value. Women with low cultural quality have difficulties in correctly and effectively handle the huge machines, so insufficient training opportunities is very convenient for them. Let alone the associations and organizations which can enrich their leisure time. To sum up, insufficient skill trainings and colorful activities reduce the quality of life.

## **DOMESTIC REASONS**

### **Transformation of Domestic Labor Division Mode**

With the influence of traditional feudal thoughts, main family labor division mode is "men go out and women stay at home" in rural china. But later, the benefits of going out are more than those of farming. So aimed at realizing the maximum benefits, men go out to earn more money and women stay at home to take care of other family members, which is regarded as the pattern of "men to work while women to farm". The forming reason of the pattern is men have high priority in the distribution of benefits. Such inequality makes women stay at home.

### **Influence from Domestic Economy**

Actually, in contrast with life in city, people in countryside live in a relaxing and easy life. But they still choose to go out to earn money, because they are in lower economic status. Family income is the key factor which can decide the living standards of family. Although there are rich sources in the countryside, the farmers have no ability and access to become prosperous. Hence the main income are farming and family members in the countryside mainly engage in the single agricultural production labor. Especially in some years, the price of agricultural productions remain the same for a long time, which resulted in lower economic level. And the income is lower than their expenses. But in order to meet subsistence demand requires, they have to go out to improve the standards of daily life. The best choice is men going out and women staying at home. But the choice is aimed at meeting the basic needs of life, which can be regarded as reluctant behavior. And the problems and inconvenience the women are confronted with at home are much more than the joy and gains men get for the family. The frequent absences of men bring some bad moods, such as disappointment and depression. Meanwhile, the double workload brings heavy physical load.

### **Influence from Domestic Duties**

Out of domestic duties, men go out to earn money to provide financial support for family; women stay home to take care of children and the old, meanwhile, they need to finish daily farm work. In some sense, the mode is very ideal that men and women perform their own duties, which is helpful for family harmony. But actually, such arrangement brings invisible pressure to women who stay at home.

Firstly, women need to do all the farm work which was done by men and women together in the past. In other words, their workload doubles and they need to spend time doing something they did not try in the past. Meanwhile, men's frequent and prolonged absences make women have to take care of children and the old on their own from any aspects of life. Especially for women with low cultural quality, helping children with homework is proving difficult. To sum up, women are faced with physical weakness and insufficient knowledge.

What's more, they are also facing mental pressure. Closer examination of how young persons mutually negotiate mobility and parent-child care expectations brings into focus the new forms of agency, power and vulnerability that they encounter in migration and migrant-origin contexts [8]. In the course of a child's development, father and mother both play the crucial role. Father's absence makes mother have to perform the functions of mother and father. And even some children are in the rebellious period that mother needs to pay more attention to their children's minds and behavior to communicate effectively. In addition, women need to tolerate their aloneness when they miss husbands. Meanwhile, they have to be in the face of rumors when they may have a good relationship with other men. Those invisible things all can put amounts of pressure on women. China's rapid urbanization has created large scale of population migration, resulting in many villages being dominated by "left-behind" women, and weak governance of those collectively owned resources. The situation has required these women to take up the functions of decision-making and governance as a remedial mechanism as well as a new path [9].

## **INDIVIDUAL REASONS**

### **Low Cultural Quality**

Due to the idea that men are superior to women, women's many foundational rights are abridged, which is specially manifested as women's degree of education. On the one hand, it was thought that female should marry and work as soon as possible rather than receive education. So dropping out of school or deprived of education are common phenomenons for rural women. On the other hand, in countryside, people have much less opportunity to receive education. So although some women luckily receives education, they are still in a low degree of education. In such situation, most of the rural women are in low cultural equality. And meanwhile, as women, they are not suited to manual work for a long time. With no knowledge or strength, it is very difficult for them to seek for a job outside.

China's rapid urbanization has created large scale of population migration, resulting in many villages being dominated by "left-behind" women, and weak governance of those collectively owned resources [10]. Meanwhile, because of insufficient knowledge, they have many difficulties in life. For example, they can not make use of large machines, which increases time cost and difficulties. Sometimes when they engage in agricultural trainings, they even can not understand the content and master the skills. Without enough knowledge and experience, when they educate their children, they are direct and impatient so that their ability is not equal to their ambition. Even for women in other areas, depression is a common thing. For example, the migration of working-aged men from Mexico to the United States fractures the family-centered support structures typical of Latin America and contributes to high levels of depression in women left behind in migratory sending communities in Mexico [9]. And the status of left-behind is an independent risk factor of depressive symptoms in rural women [11]. All difficulties and problems make their have time and energy to change the situation.

### **Tied down by Traditional Concepts**

Women have traditionally been at disadvantage in many countries in the world, due partly to the strong patriarchal tradition which often impinges the rights of women. Hence women's empowerment is a major concern in the developing world and is emerging as an important indicator of the development of a society as well as the status of women [12]. Under the influence of the ideas that men should go out and women should stay at home and low cultural quality of the women, some women are willing to stay at home to take care of the family. To some extent, they can not really realize their values and the importance of self-development. On the contrary, they blindly pursue family interests. From the aspect of economy, they completely depend on their husbands who are earning money outside so that sometimes they lose basic rights of speech. Meanwhile, they give up improving themselves and refuse to know something new. In a word, they will donate to their family with their whole lives. And they will be confined to the small family.

The aim of ABET was to provide the educationally disadvantaged individuals, especially rural women, with knowledge and skills for livelihood in the countryside. Despite this initiative, rural women still lack skills for better living. Without basic education, these rural folks can be condemned to perpetual poverty and desolate [13].

## CONCLUSION

Actually, separated married life has made women more vulnerable. In the end, it points to the fact that rural women are experiencing a new and deeper form of exploitation of their labour. Thus they are among those paying a heavy price for the development in China [14]. The pattern of “men go out and women stay at home” is a spontaneous initiative of farmers in the rural economic transition. This mode and cooperation between the male and female objectively develop economy in rural areas, increase family income for farmers and ensure the stability of rural families. However, the influence of the pattern also has its own disadvantages and limitations. The women are suffering double pains—physical struggles and mental pressure.

Weak groups need social assistance and support. And a good social support system should be made up of four parts—the government, the society, the family and the potential of the objects [15]. Therefore, the government and organizations of society should pay more attention to the rural left-behind women, their husbands are necessary to care about their wives, and meanwhile left-behind women should also be self-reliant and self-reliant.

Firstly, the government and organizations of society should spend time and money in training and educating left-behind women. Through various education, activities and trainings are provided for women to improve the comprehensive quality of left-behind women, so that women are capable to figure out who they are and what they should do. Secondly, as husbands, they should recognize their wives’ contribution for the family, try to understand their wife’s difficulties and help his wife achieve synchronous development to maintain the stability and harmony of the family. Thirdly, left-behind women should be independent, self-conscious and self-reliant. They are also take the roles in the family as important as the men. With the manifestation of their economic contributions, left-behind women are increasingly involved in family decision-making. But in the face of rapid changes in family roles. With the urbanization pace lagging behind the husband and the weakening of marriage relationship, they are required to be more independent, independent and self-reliant.

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