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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### AN ANALYSIS OF THE GROWTH OF COLLEGE STUDENTS GROWING UP FROM LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN - TAKING COLLEGE STUDENTS AT HUNAN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AS AN EXAMPLE

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#### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The problem of left-behind children is a focus of social concern. **Objectives:** In order to investigate the situation and characteristics of college students who grow up from left-behind children, this paper conducts a comparative study of college students who grow up from left-behind children and those who grow up from non-left-behind children in Hunan University of Science and Technology from four aspects: thought, life, study and work. **Material & methods:** 174 students with "Left-behind experience" and 190 students without "Left-behind experience" were investigated. **Results:** According to the survey findings, there is no significant difference between college students with left-behind experience and college students without left-behind experience on learning burden; The proportion of college students with left-behind experience willing to participate in campus activities is lower than that of college students without left-behind experience; there is any experience of left-behind does not affect college students' habit of smoking or drinking, but 4% of college students often smoke or drink alcohol; College students with left-behind experience and college students without left-behind experience had the same proportion of love before they went to college, accounting for 61% and 62% respectively. **Conclusion:** When college students with left-behind experience have psychological doubts and puzzles, they hardly turn to teachers and school psychological counsellor for help; These college students are not all "problem students"; These college students are not enthusiastic enough to participate in university, college or class activities; These college students fully understand their parents hard work.

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## INTRODUCTION

In rural areas, some children under the age of 16 have to be left behind by their parents or elders, others or self-care, education and management because their parents go out to work for a long time ( $\geq 6$  months per year) (Xu Liping, 2013). These children are called "Left-behind children". Since the 1980s, the tide of peasants' migration to cities in China spread throughout the country. The phenomenon of "Left-behind Children" is also widespread in the vast rural areas of China. According to a study by the Center for Population and Development Research, the Renmin University of China, the left-behind children in China is close to 20 million. 43.83% of parents went out to work unilaterally while one of them stayed behind to live with children. The proportion of both parents going out to work was as high as 56.17%. The parents' going out makes the left-behind children become "orphans" or "single-parent children" in a sense, thus resulting in "Inter-generational education" and "single-parent family" in reality.

In the critical period of the development of children's cognition, emotion, learning, morality and personality, due to the long-term absence of parents and the inter-generational education, left-behind children can not get reasonable guidance and education, resulting in their psychological quality, moral quality, physical health, learning life and many other aspects of defects and deviations (Zhang Dongli, et al., 2007; Li Xiaoyun, et al., 2014; Xiaojun Sun, et al., 2015). With time, the first generation of "left-behind children" has changed its identity. They have entered the youth stage. Some stepped into the university, and will soon become the national backbone. Therefore, it is of practical significance to study the current situation and characteristics of college students who grow up from left-behind children. From the existing research, there are few studies on college students with left-behind experience. Moreover, the existing literature is more concerned about their psychological status or personality traits and has not thoroughly analyzed the impact of their psychological status on

their lives. Studies by Wen Yiyuan et al. showed that the college students who grow up from left-behind children are more lonely, introverted and emotionally indifferent than the college students who grow up from non-left-behind children. The fewer times parents reunite with their children, the more likely they are to harm the formation of their children's good personality. From the junior high school stage, left-behind life has the most far-reaching impact on students' personality (Wen Yiyuan, 2009; Luo Jing *et al.*, 2009). Zhang Lihua et al. found that there are many problems in the psychological characteristics of college students with left-behind experience in their youth, such as low self-evaluation, emotional instability, withdrawal of interpersonal communication, unbalanced psychological development level (Zhang Lihua, 2006). College students are the hope of the future of our country. It must pay attention to the problems in their growth process. This paper focuses on the impact of the psychological characteristics of college students with left-behind experience on their thoughts, work, study and life to providing data support and useful suggestions for relevant research.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this paper, a questionnaire survey was conducted among first-year students and fifth-year students of Hunan University of Science and Technology. Because the source of school enrolment in this university covers all parts of the country, the survey is representative. A total of 400 questionnaires were randomly distributed in this survey, and 364 valid questionnaires were recovered, with an effective rate of 91%. Among them, 174 students with "Left-behind experience" accounted for 48% of the valid questionnaires; 190 students without "Left-behind experience" accounted for 52% of the valid questionnaires.

## RESULTS

In order to comprehensively analyze the situation of college students with left-behind experience, the questionnaire mainly covers four aspects, namely, thought, life, study and work.

**Study:** Because guardians are busy with heavy work at home, or are too old, or old-fashioned, or inconvenient to move, they seldom pay attention to and understand the study situation of left-behind children in school. Besides, the absence of parents, left-behind children lost the best opportunity for education. When left-behind children made academic success or failure, parents rarely had the opportunity to adopt the most direct and effective ways to encourage, reward or guide them correctly (Wang Liangfeng, et al., 2006). Also, the high tuition fees, employment difficulties and even the lack of employment greatly frustrate the enthusiasm of farmers to invest in children's education, resulting in their children's education to adopt a laissez-faire attitude. It is in this environment that college students with left-behind experience are admitted to the university, and what attitude their parents hold towards their study is worthy of attention. Table 1 showed that for college students, whether they grow up from left-behind children or non-left-behind children, most of their parents had been supporting them to study well. Surveys showed that parents are usually most concerned about their children's physical condition, followed by learning. Although the rate of parents' casual attitude towards children's learning is minimal, the proportion of parents of left-behind children is more significant than that of parents of non-left-behind children.

From the perspective of students' learning motivation, most of them are for their future, followed by repaying their parents, while the other ratios are smaller (Table 1). Among them, the proportion of college students with left-behind experience who study in return for their parents is higher than that of college students without left-behind experience. That is to say, most college students with left-behind experience are studying in order to repay their parents and make them have a good life.

According to the survey findings, 60% and 65% of the college students with and without left-behind experience think that their current learning burden is ordinary, 16% and 12% believe that the current learning burden is light, 24% and 23% believe that the current learning burden is heavy. Thus, there is no significant difference between college students with left-behind experience and college students without left-behind experience on the issue of learning burden. The reason is that students who feel burdened with learning want to learn too much, but they do not have enough time. The second reason is the pressure to find a job.

**Work:** A considerable number of children have a strong sense of loss and abandonment when their parents go out to work, so they do not like to talk for a long time, do not like to associate with others, and become autistic. Some of them also have the characteristics of depression, inferiority complex, closeness, loneliness, non-group, unwillingness to associate with others, fear of being bullied by others, and strong consciousness of seeking protection or self-protection. Furthermore, some students have psychological barriers, such as emotional fragility, anxiety, autism, lack of self-confidence, pessimism and negativity (Wang Liangfeng, et al., 2006). This paper aims to determine the impact of "Stay-behind Experience" on college life by investigating whether college students with left-behind experience are willing to participate in school, college or class activities. The survey found that the proportion of college students with left-behind experience willing to participate in campus activities is lower than that of college students without left-behind experience (Fig. 1).

**Life:** This article tried to understand college students living conditions from "Are there any bad preferences?", "Whose care do you want most when you are sick?", "Attitudes towards puppy love", "Physical condition", and "The person who can talk about psychological puzzlement and doubts".

**Bad preferences:** Because the left-behind children lack timely and effective guidance, education and restraint in their behaviour development and judgment of things, their correct outlook on life and world outlook have not yet been formed. They tend to be weak in non-sense and judgment. In this way, some left-behind children with strong self-care ability blindly think that they are competent, so they are stubborn and disobedient to discipline. Such students are very vulnerable to temptation and adverse effects and deviate their growth from the proper orbit (Zhou Fang *et al.*, 2007).

The questionnaire is designed to find out whether college students with left-behind experience are more likely to be tempted to form bad preferences, such as smoking or drinking, than college students without left-behind experience. From Fig. 2, it can be found that whether there is any experience of left-behind does not affect college students' habit of smoking or drinking. The majority of college students never or occasionally smoke or drink, while only a small proportion of them often smoke or drink, accounting for only 4%.

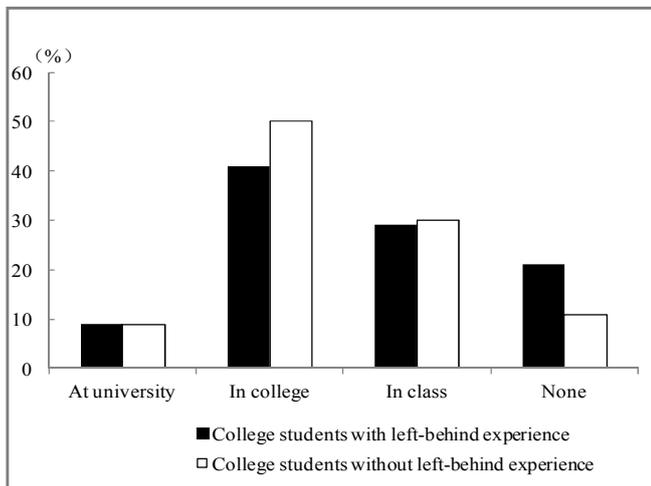


Fig. 1 Status of appointment at the university

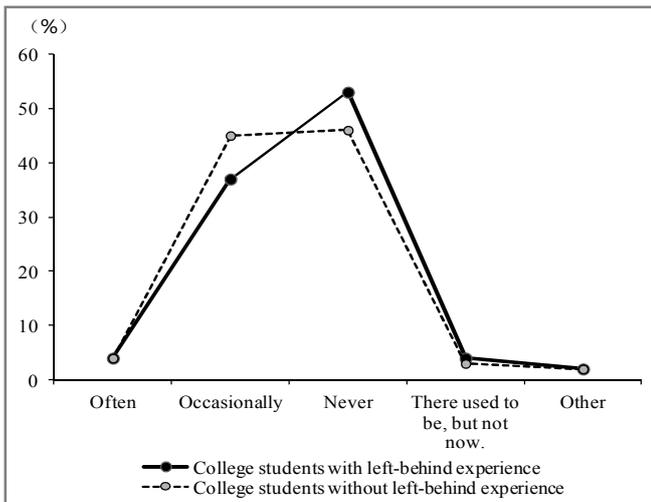


Fig. 2. Whether to smoke or drink

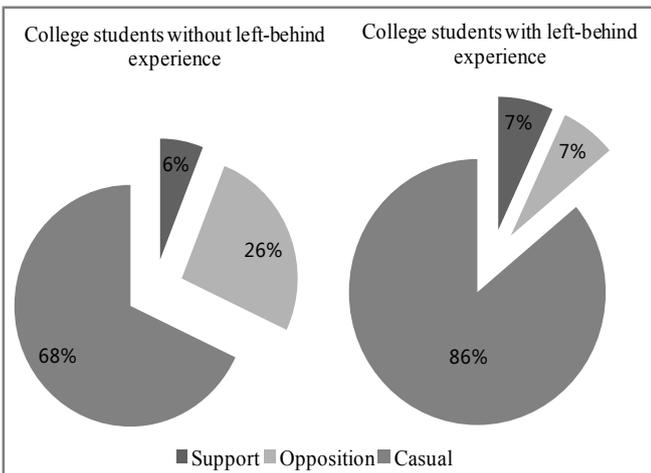


Fig. 3 Attitudes towards Puppy Love

It is worth noting that the proportion of college students who never smoke or drink when they grow up from left-behind children is higher than that of college students who grow up from non-left-behind children.

**Whose care do they want most when they are sick?:** Whether college students with left-behind experience or college students without left-behind experience, they most want to be cared for by their mothers when they are sick at an early age.

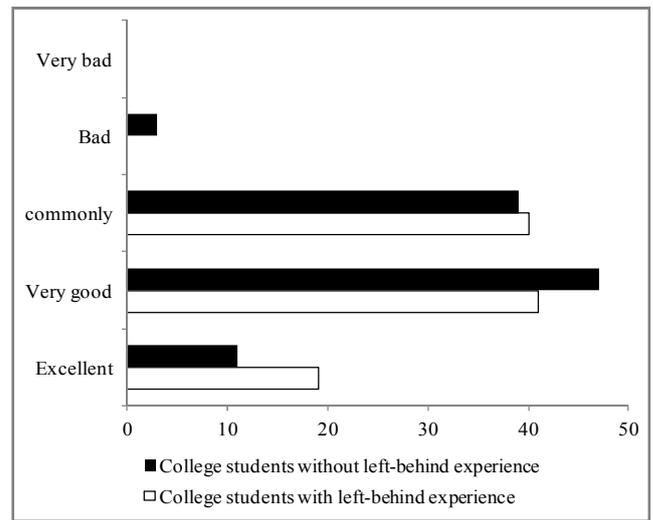


Fig. 4. Physical condition

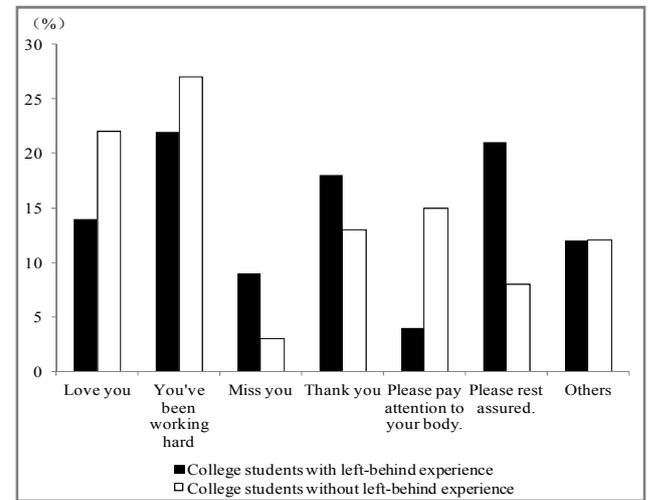


Fig. 5. What college students want to say to their parents

However, at the University stage, most students choose to take care of themselves. In this respect, there is not much difference between college students with left-behind experience and college students without left-behind experience. However, the difference is that, when college students with left-behind experience are young, although they want to be cared for by their mothers, most of the time, their mothers are not around. As a result, they often fail to do so. In the circumstances mentioned above, people around them need to take the initiative to care for and care for them. At the University stage, every college student has become an adult, and they should learn to take care of themselves.

**Attitudes towards puppy love:** Because left-behind children are separated from their parents all the year-round, there is a vacuum in their emotions, and guardians often have no time to take into account their emotional changes, so in the psychological state of general insecurity and psychological belonging, they turn the need for love and being loved to their peers, especially the opposite sex (Ren Yunchang, 2009). Therefore, they are more likely to have puppy love. Had college students with left-behind experience ever experienced puppy love? What are their attitudes toward puppy love?. The results of this survey showed that the rate of puppy love support of college students without left-behind experience is significantly higher than that of college students with left-behind experience (Fig. 3). College students with left-behind

experience and college students without left-behind experience had the same proportion of love before they went to college, accounting for 61% and 62% respectively. This result coincides with Yu Jie's research conclusion (Yu Jie, et al., 2006). Although quite many college students who have grown up from left-behind children have been in puppy love, they still do not support puppy love, or even oppose it. At the same time, 39% and 38% of college students have no first love (Table 1).

**Physical condition:** Because the parents of the left-behind children work outside, the guardians generally neglect to take care of the left-behind children, and cannot get timely treatment when they are ill. Lack of parents' careful care makes the nutrition and living arrangements of the growing children lack scientific arrangement, and the nutrition acquisition is not comprehensive enough. Therefore, the physical health of left-behind children is worrying (Li Zhiming, 2011). Then, the physical condition of college students with left-behind experience is also a noteworthy problem. The percentage of college students with left-behind experience who feel they are in good health is higher than that of college students without left-behind experience. However, some fewer students think they are in excellent health, and the proportion of college students with left-behind experience is higher than that of college students without left-behind experience. It is gratifying that college students with left-behind experience do not feel "Bad" or "Very bad" (Fig. 4). Most of the basis for college students to judge their health is whether they often take part in physical exercise, rather than their diet and other aspects. Therefore, whether there is any experience of left-behind does not affect college students' judgment of their physical condition.

**The person who can talk about psychological puzzlement and doubts:** Compared with college students without left-behind experience, college students with left-behind experience have lived in an incomplete family since childhood, so they often lack complete full family care. Besides, parents of college students with left-behind experience lack of understanding of how to communicate with their children and do not give their children more understanding and care in spirit and emotion, so there is no place to pour out the confusion and doubts for college students with left-behind experience. Whether college students have or have no experience of left-behind, they like to talk about their doubts and puzzles to their classmates and friends (Table 1).

Before entering college, 13% of college students without left-behind experience would choose to tell mothers their doubts, while only 5% of college students with left-behind experience would choose their mothers because college students with left-behind experience did not have or seldom had this opportunity. However, the ratio of choosing "Classmates and friends" or "Do not tell others" was significantly higher among college students with left-behind experience than college students without left-behind experience, which was 5% and 4% higher respectively. During college, the rate of choosing to speak to mothers was fairly low, whether they had or had no experience of left-behind. Despite all this, the proportion of college students with left-behind experience choosing not to tell anyone is still higher than that of college students without left-behind experience. Moreover, college students with left-behind experience will not even choose teachers and school counsellors as the objects of their talk.

**What college students want to say to their parents:** Among the valid questionnaires, 81 college students who grew up with left-behind children answered the question "What do you want to say to your parents now?" However, 116 college students who grew up with non-left-behind children answered this question. Firstly, the proportion of college students who want to say "You have been working hard" to their parents is the largest. Especially among college students who have no left-behind experience. Secondly, 21% of college students who have left behind experience want to say "Do not worry, I will not let you down" to their parents, while only 8% of college students who have no left behind experience want to express the same meaning.

Thirdly, the proportion of college students with left-behind experience who want to say "Please pay attention to your body" to their parents is 4%, and the proportion of college students without left-behind experience is 15% (Fig. 5). From this, it can be seen that college students without left-behind experience are more aware of their parents' hard work, pay more attention to their parents' bodies, and want to show their love to their parents than college students with left-behind experience. College students with left-behind experience miss their parents more than college students without left-behind experience.

Meanwhile, college students with left-behind experience want to express their gratitude to parents and want their parents to be at ease with themselves. All of these "love you", "hard work", "miss you", "thank you", "take care of your body" and "rest assured" show that college students understand their parents and know that their parents have paid a lot for themselves. However, for the words most students wanted to say to parents, a small number of students wrote down "no money, remit some money", "nothing to say", "I seem yet grown up, how to do" and so on.

## Conclusion

Through the questionnaire survey, it is found that the number of college students with left-behind experience is not small in the whole college students. The results of the survey showed that:

- Parents of college students who grow up from left-behind children are too concerned about their children's psychological status. When such students have psychological doubts and puzzles, they hardly turn to teachers and school psychological counsellor for help.
- College students who grow up from left-behind children are not all "problem students", most of them do not have bad habits such as smoking and drinking. Most of them hope to change their fate by studying science and culture hard and repay their parents in the future.
- College students who grow up from left-behind children are not enthusiastic enough to participate in university, college or class activities.
- College students who grow up from left-behind children may resent their parents when they are young, but when they grow up, they change their views on their parents. They expressed their understanding of their parents' hard work.

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