

The Well-being of Left-behind Children in Rural Sichuan, China

Long Ling¹, Siti Hajar Abu Bakar Ah², Noralina Omar³

Abstract

Chinese scholars focused on the status of children's subjective well-being. However, one significant gap is the need to measure comprehensive child well-being in China's backward economic rural areas. The study adopted a multidimensional child well-being approach and child-centred perspective to measure rural left-behind children's material, physical, educational, psychological, and social well-being and present the multidimensional well-being of left-behind children in rural China. The study adopted a quantitative approach, and the survey method was the preferred approach for this study. A multistage random sampling technique was used to choose the geographical location of the study, study area, and children as survey respondents. Four hundred eighty left-behind children aged 10 to 16 in Sichuan province, China, were selected for the study. The selected left-behind children experienced a high level of well-being domains, except for moderate educational well-being. However, pocket money, physical exercise, academic achievement, child welfare for education, social services, coping strategies, and activity engagement were the core targets to promote the left-behind children's well-being through improving social expenditure on children, empowering the child welfare system, and providing sufficient social services in school in China.

Keywords: *Left-behind children; well-being; social expenditure; child welfare; social service.*

Introduction

The World Migration Report estimated that there were 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020, with China being the second-ranked international migrant (IOM, 2022). Meanwhile, China had 292 million internal migrant workers at the end of 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Massive population migration and mobility driven by employment opportunities made left-behind children a common issue in China. Furthermore, China Statistical Yearbook reported 6,900,082 left-behind children at junior high schools and 3,965,931 left-behind children at primary schools in 2023 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2023; Li et al., 2023). As a result, left-behind children have become the most debatable social issue in China.

Previous studies have reported the health problems, academic problems, psychological problems, and social problems of left-behind children in China. Few studies on left-behind children's well-being in China emphasize subjective well-being. Past studies adopted a particular incomprehensive dimension approach, focused on some geographical regions of China, catered for specific social development programs, and offered minimal measurable domains. Thus, a more comprehensive multidimensional approach must reflect the actual scenario.

Currently, there needs to be more information concerning Chinese left-behind children's well-being in a multidimensional manner. Additionally, there are no government-recognized indicators, indexes, or particular databases for child well-being in China. Therefore, it is impossible to make comparisons of child well-being in China and conduct comparative studies with other countries. Without data comparison, there is no way to see the gap or progress in the welfare of children in China, and it is impossible to guide the child welfare policy more accurately. This lack has created a research gap, urging Chinese scholars to develop child well-being indicators and multidimensional scales for Chinese children, monitor the status and progress of children's well-being and provide a basis for policymakers to safeguard their well-being. A multidimensional scale to measure the well-being of Chinese left-behind children helps to discover the gaps

¹ Department of Social Administration and Justice, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: s2037710@siswa.um.edu.my

² Department of Social Administration and Justice, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: shajar@um.edu.my ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0808-833X>.

³ Department of Social Administration and Justice, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: noralina@um.edu.my ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5702-6696>

in the well-being of rural left-behind children and gives a new direction to the social welfare policies and social services for left-behind children in China.

Literature Review

Child Well-Being Concept

The definition of child well-being varies from different perspectives and contexts. For example, the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child and the European Human Rights Charter set out children's rights as critically related to child well-being, which supports children to grow prosperously (Noralina & Siti Hajar, 2017). The ecological perspective on child development puts the child in the context where they experience the interaction between children and essential factors that influence children's well-being (Oliver & Dagmar, 2019).

From the social policy viewpoint, child well-being refers to how a child's welfare is satisfied based on the indicators of quality of life (Ben-Arieh, 2014). From this viewpoint, children's well-being refers to children's core needs to be fulfilled, and children can access services set by the child rights (Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2017). Axford (2018) emphasizes the richness and breadth of child well-being by discussing the five concepts of needs, rights, poverty, quality of life, and social exclusion. Bradshaw (2015) defined quality of life (QoL) as children's subjective well-being and focused on outcomes, such as health and happiness.

All of the above-mentioned defined child well-being from an adult's perspective. Children can participate in activities that impact their well-being and their childhood. The child-centred perspective can better measure and understand the children's feelings, lives, and activities. Past empirical data has proven that children's views on well-being may differ from adults (Ben-Arieh, 2014; Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2017). Children's well-being includes their views, evaluations, and aspirations about their lives and feelings. Researchers must listen to children and value their opinions and evaluations of their well-being. This child-participatory approach concludes that children's well-being is defined through their feelings, combining happiness and sadness (Ben-Arieh, 2014). China still needs to form a clear definition of child well-being. This study adopts the ecological perspective of child well-being, that child well-being is the assessment of the degree to which children's survival and development are satisfied from the perspective or voice of the children.

Child Well-Being Measurement

There are many indexes for measuring child well-being in the world. Four of which are often mentioned are the index of child and youth well-being in the United States, by Land and colleagues (Land et al., 2007); the index of child well-being in the EU, built by Bradshaw and colleagues (Bradshaw et al., 2007), the Microdata child well-being index, by Moore and colleagues (Moore et al., 2008), and the child deprivation index, by Bastos and colleagues (Bastos et al., 2004; 2009). These four child well-being indexes adopted a multi-dimensional approach.

Among the child well-being indexes frequently mentioned globally, the microdata child well-being index built by Moore and colleagues is consistent with the theoretical framework. It inspires the variable set in this research. Moore and colleagues (2008) propose four child well-being outcome domains and four contextual domains for measuring children's well-being (Moore et al., 2008). The four children's well-being domains include physical, educational, psychological, and social well-being.

China is a developing country. Absolute poverty in rural areas was eliminated in 2020, and the relative poverty of left-behind children in rural areas is relatively standard. So, this study refers to the material deprivation index built by Siti Hajar et al. (2021) to develop the material well-being domain. Therefore, the well-being of left-behind children contains five child well-being domains, namely material well-being, physical well-being, educational well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being

The child well-being indices are composed of indicators compiled by different available surveys or databases for different purposes. For example, the microdata child well-being index comprised 69 indicators selected from the National Child Health Survey (NSCH) used to monitor children's health in the United States (Moore et al., 2008). The data came from different databases, which may limit the conclusions. There was a need for more agreement on which indicators and domains should be chosen to construct the child well-

being indices. Many child well-being indices usually contain the education, health, and material domains. However, the indicators were selected from the different surveys, which needed to be completed in some critical domains. For example, although physical health was considered a meaningful domain, the child well-being index included only a few indicators of children's physical health (Moore et al., 2008). The incomplete indicators could not measure all of the children's needs.

Although many studies claimed to use children as the unit of analysis (i.e., Bradshaw, 2022), most surveys were based on the respondents from parents and not the children themselves, ignoring children's views on well-being. Better indicators that adequately represent children's perceptions of their well-being are needed. The shortcomings of research on child well-being in the past have created new gaps. The present study of child well-being should take left-behind children as the investigation and analysis-centered. The left-behind children self-administered the child well-being questionnaire, an essential chance for children to express their views on their well-being. In addition, the indicators and domains from the same survey may better understand the overall of child well-being, which can be the basis for formulating social policy and services for children.

Social Policy and Social Service for Children's Well-being

Social Expenditure on Children

Education, child health, and family benefits and services were the three most significant components of government efforts for children in the OECD (OECD, 2023). China spent over 4% of its GDP on education for six consecutive years (UNICEF, 2019). There is no separate data for the expenditure on child health care and family benefits in China. Improving social expenditure on children was a crucial way to reduce child poverty, improve children's physical health and empower children's enrollment in school.

Social Service for Children

Developed countries or high-income regions provide accessible or affordable full-time or part-time childcare services and home help services for families with children in the community. For example, in Korea, the government provides free childcare services for all children and supplies family therapy and counselling services for vulnerable children or abused children. The local government provided child welfare and protection services in communities. It provided counselling services, group work services or whole school services in schools that promoted children's academic achievement and physical health.

Methods

Physical Location of the Study

China consists of thirty-four provincial administrative districts. The Sichuan province was selected because most rural left-behind children were from Sichuan (The Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2018). Therefore, the location of the study is rural villages in Sichuan province, where many left-behind children live at risk and are vulnerable in backward areas.

Research Approach

The study followed the research direction of child well-being and adopted a quantitative approach to develop well-being indicators. The quantitative approach has survey and experimental designs and focuses on measuring variables to answer research questions (Creswell, 2018). Survey methods allow the researcher to examine and draw general conclusions from response patterns. Hence, the survey method was the preferred approach for this study.

Data Collection Technique and Instrument

The present study used a structured questionnaire and adopted the face-to-face interview to fill out the questionnaire in left-behind children's homes. First, the researcher obtained the written consent of the acting guardians before starting the questionnaire survey. If the children could not understand the question, the researcher explained and assisted them. The data collection was conducted from June to December 2022. This present study referred to the Microdata child well-being index to develop the physical, educational, psychological, and social domains. It adopted the material deprivation index built by Siti Hajar et al. (2021) to develop the material well-being domain for the child well-being questionnaire.

Sampling and Respondents' Profiles

A multistage sampling technique was used to choose the geographical location of the study, study area, and children as survey respondents. The researchers selected the geographical location of the study, which resulted in twenty villages from Sichuan province, China. Four hundred eighty left-behind children aged ten to sixteen from the Sichuan province, China, were recruited for the study. The researcher distributed 480 questionnaires. However, six acting guardians refused to sign the consent, ten children were withdrawn from the study, and four went to migrant parents' cities. As a result, the researcher collected 460 questionnaires. However, nine were discarded due to incomplete responses on educational or psychological items, and 451 questionnaires were usable in the study. The response rate is 93.96 per cent. Table 1 presents the respondents' profile of this study.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the study's respondents.

Gender	Percent (%)	Gender	Percent (%)
Girl	48.1	Boy	51.9
Age (years)	Percent (%)	Age (years)	Percent (%)
10	12.4	14	13.1
11	10.0	15	9.5
12	24.8	16	4.9
13	25.3	Total	100.0
Acting guardian	Percent (%)	Acting guardian	Percent (%)
Grandparents	93.8	Relatives	3.3
Brother/Sister	0.9	Neighbour	0
Others	2.0	Total	100.0
Grade	Percent (%)	Grade	Percent (%)
3-6	35.5	7-9	57.6
10-12	6.9	Total	100.0
Left-behind Time (Months)	Min	Max	Mean
	6	168	36.27

Data Analysis

The data in this research was collected by questionnaires, compiled, and analyzed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software program, version 28. The method of analysis involved in this study was descriptive analysis. The descriptive analysis reported score, percentage and score value of child well-being items, domains, and overall well-being. The study determined the level of child well-being domains and overall well-being based on the scale developed by Bradshaw et al. (2007) and UNICEF (2013). Table 2 presents the score value and child well-being level used in the study.

Table 2. The individual well-being level scale.

Score value (%)	The well-being level
81 and above	Very high
75-80	High
41-74	Moderate
20-40	Low
<20	Very low

Research Ethics

This research strictly complied with the Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC) regulations during the research process. The study was approved by UMREC (Reference Number: UM.TNC2/UMREC-1896). All left-behind children participated voluntarily and withdrew from this study at any time. Additionally, all left-behind children had informed consent signed by their acting guardians in the study.

Results

Socio-Demographic Profiles of the Study's Respondents

Table 1 shows that 451 left-behind children participated in the study, comprising 51.9 per cent boys and 48.1 per cent girls. The study involved the left-behind children adopting the State Council of China's definition under sixteen years old (The State Council of China, 2016). The study decided on the age of ten as the minimum age limit because, at this level of development, children can express their views on their well-being independently. Therefore, their age range was between ten and sixteen, with an average age of 12.65 (SD=1.61). In the present study, 93.8 per cent of left-behind children were taken care of by their grandparents, the mean of left-behind time was 36.27 months (SD=36.91), and 55 per cent of included left-behind children had separated from migrant parents more than twelve months. In addition, 35.5 per cent of left-behind children were at primary schools, 57.6 per cent were at junior schools, and 6.9 per cent were at high schools.

The Well-Being of Left-Behind Children in Sichuan, China

The level of included left-behind children's overall well-being was approximately high, with a score value of 78.89 per cent (Table 3). In addition, the included left-behind children reported a very high level of material, psychological, and social well-being, a high level of physical well-being, and a medium level of educational well-being (Table 3).

In detail, the result highlighted that the included left-behind children reported unmet needs on financial items, faced overweight and insufficient health promotion behaviours, and experienced lower level of academic performance, child welfare for education, and child protection related services in school (Table 4). There is an urgent need to focus on left-behind children's coping strategies and activity engagement (Table 5).

Table 3. Respondent's well-being domain.

Domain	Score Value (%)	The level of well-being
Material well-being	85.83	Very high
Physical well-being	79.82	High
Educational well-being	56.21	Medium
Psychological well-being	81.64	Very high
Social well-being	81.63	Very high
Total	78.89	High

Table 4. Respondent's material, physical, and educational well-being indicators.

Variable	Yes (%)	No (%)
Material well-being		
Eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner every day	90.2	9.8
Medicine	88.0	12.0
Enough Pocket money	70.3	29.7
Enough money for School trips and activities	64.5	35.5
Two pairs of good shoes	92.0	8.0
Good clothes to wear	94.9	5.1
A mobile phone	75.2	24.8
A place to study at home	92.7	7.3
TV	97.1	2.9
Internet	93.3	6.7
Physical well-being		
Healthy	96.0	4.0
Not over weight	78.3	21.7
Health insurance	85.4	14.6
Exercise every day	59.6	40.4
Adequate sleep every day	77.8	22.2
Easily go to the nearest clinic/hospital	80.3	19.7
Immunization	96.9	3.1
Social support services	64.7	35.3
Educational well-being		
Go to school	98.9	1.1
Happy with exam result	38.1	61.9

Doing well with study	36.4	63.6
Have free lunch at school	54.8	45.2
Use all the free accommodation at school	40.1	59.9
Go to the counselling service at school	43.7	56.3
Receive financial assistance at school	43.7	56.3
Access to child protection services at school	61.6	38.4

Table 5. Respondent's psychological and social well-being indicators.

Variable	Always (%)	Sometimes (%)	Never (%)
Psychological Well-being			
Have a good life with my family	77.6	21.5	0.9
Be happy with my life	74.1	24.2	1.8
Appreciate my life	77.2	20.2	2.7
Be positive about my life	71.8	25.7	2.4
Have an ambition to achieve	62.7	24.3	11.4
Have motivation to be a success person	65.2	29.5	5.3
Respect myself	82.9	14.6	2.4
Be confident with myself	65.9	29.0	5.1
Handle my stress	49.4	38.8	11.8
Handle problem positively	53.0	39.7	7.3
Social Well-being			
Care for parents/ grandparents	82.9	15.7	1.4
Trust my parents/grandparents	75.7	21.4	2.9
Understand my parent's feelings	78.4	20.0	1.6
Get along well with my friends	77.1	20.0	2.9
Care for my friends	85.7	10.0	4.3
Respect my neighbours	82.9	14.3	2.9
Respect my teachers	85.7	10.0	4.3
Help the elderly and the disabled in my community	34.3	52.9	12.9
Participate in my community activities	14.3	37.1	48.6

Discussion

The included left-behind children reported a medium level of well-being in the financial items. Pocket money plays a vital role in left-behind children's well-being. The relatively more pocket money not only reduced the psychological distance between migrant parents and left-behind children but also facilitated the children to better adapt to the left-behind life, thus increasing their sense of well-being (Fan & Fan, 2020). Therefore, based on the importance of pocket money on left-behind children's well-being, the study advised migrant parents and acting guardians to improve their pocket money at the same adequate level as their counterparts, which may enhance their well-being and improve parent-child relationships.

In the study, 24.8 per cent of respondents' families did not have a mobile phone, which may limit communication between left-behind children and migrant parents. The mobile phone is one of the essential communication tools in China. The family without a mobile phone may be in poverty status, which can be the basis for the Child Welfare Department to supply exceptional support for families without a mobile phone to contact migrant parents.

Comparing the results of the material domain from China and Malaysia, the Chinese left-behind children fulfilled higher levels of nutrition needs, health needs, clothes, mobile phones, TV, and the Internet than those poor Malaysian children (Siti Hajar et al., 2021). However, poor Malaysian children experienced higher financial needs than left-behind children in rural China (Siti Hajar et al., 2021). Based on the child deprivation rate method in the Innocenti Report Card 11, this study's child deprivation rate was 40.1 per cent, lower than Romania and Bulgaria and higher than the other 27 countries. They should be the targets of material assistance from the Child Protection Department to safeguard their nutrition, enough pocket money, and essential medicines.

In the study, the insurance rate for included left-behind children was nearly 10% lower than the national insurance rate (The National Healthcare Security Administration, 2022). The left-behind children without health insurance should be the core targets of the child welfare department, which may be the most vulnerable and poorest children if they become seriously ill or suffer a major accident. The child welfare department must contact children's migrant parents to inform them that the acting guardian did not buy health insurance for left-behind children and advise migrant parents to pay for children's health insurance. Regarding health-promoting behavior, the included left-behind children reported a medium level in the items, which can be a new direction for schools and communities to supply sports services for children (Table 4).

The findings highlighted children's academic performance. Half the involved left-behind children need to improve their studies and are unhappy with the examined results. In the study, 94.3% of left-behind children are guarded by their grandparents, who could not supervise their studies. Based on the analysis result, the left-behind children need study support services in schools and communities. In child welfare for education, the school lunch was a meaningful way to improve national children's nutrition. China may improve subsidies for free lunches, monitor the quality of the lunches to ensure that the nutritional needs of children are met, and provide free, reduced-cost, or self-funded lunches according to children's family income and material well-being to avoid waste.

In the present study, the left-behind children needed more free accommodation and financial assistance at school. In China, only children from low-income families who are left behind can receive free accommodation and financial assistance from schools or civil affairs departments. Thus, the analysis indicated that two of the five included left-behind children from low-income families. Next, the schools should provide child protection services for left-behind children if they have problems with guardians, as the government requires the schools to protect children based on the Chinese law of minor protection. In sum, improving child welfare for education is a core way to promote left-behind children's educational well-being.

Next, the included left-behind children had a medium level of coping strategies. There was no agreement on left-behind children's coping style in past studies in China. Based on the result in the study, the included left-behind children need to promote their coping strategies to deal with their problems and stress. Meanwhile, left-behind children had a medium level of neighbourhood participation. The school-aged children's frequency of engagement in neighbourhood activity had decreased (Imms & Adair, 2017; Simpson et al., 2019) as the children were required to go to school on school-days, resulting in less time for participating in neighbourhood activity (Chien & Lin, 2021). However, the participation was also influenced by children's health conditions and family and environmental support.

Increasing family income is a primary factor in parents' decision to migrate from rural to urban areas. Migration economically improved the whole family's welfare (World Bank, 2017). Many studies reported a positive relationship between parental migrant and children's well-being outcomes if the remittances were spent on children's food, medicines, and healthcare. Remittances helped reduce child malnutrition and positively and significantly affected short-term and middle-term nutritional status (Damodar, 2017).

However, the analysis of the study had the contrary result that Chinese left-behind children did not have enough financial support from their migrant parents. The remittances from migrant parents were not spent enough on Chinese rural left-behind children's nutrition, essential goods, medicine, financial, and communication needs. The result indicated that the left-behind children experienced material deprivation from their acting guardians, and the remittances from migrant parents should be spent on left-behind children's basic needs, especially on breakfast and medicine. Thus, the acting guardian should spend more remittances on left-behind children's lives and development.

Practice and Policy Implications

Increasing Public Expenditure on Children Well-Being

In the present study, the participating left-behind children needed to meet more objective well-being needs, such as health insurance, free lunch and accommodation, and financial assistance. The insufficient needs mentioned above are strongly related to social expenditure. Thus, this study recommends government to increase public expenditure on children's education, health, and family benefits.

The OECD countries spent an average of 4.9 per cent of their GDP on education, the most significant single component of public expenditure on children (OECD, 2022). In six consecutive years, UNICEF reported that China spent more than 4% of its GDP on education (UNICEF, 2019). In 2023, China budgeted 1554.79 billion Yuan on education, accounting for 4.1 per cent of the central-level expenditure budgets (The Ministry of Finance of China, 2023). In addition, the Chinese central government budgeted 72 billion Yuan for students' financial aid and subsidies to reduce the burden of education on low-income families in 2023, accounting for 0.19 per cent of the central-level expenditure budgets (The Ministry of Finance of China, 2023). The study recommends the central government spend 5 per cent of central-level expenditure on education and 0.4 per cent of central-level expenditure budgets on students' financial aid and subsidies as China is the second largest economy in the world and the public expenditure on education is recommended to be in line with the medium level of OECD countries' public expenditure on education.

The increasing expenditure on education is the primary recommendation for recruiting counselling workers with psychology, social work, and other social service backgrounds and purchasing child protection services, counselling services, and social work services in school and community from social work service organizations or professional NGOs. The increasing expenditure of students' financial aid and subsidies is recommended to improve the coverage of free lunch and accommodation for rural children and provide financial support for left-behind children's breakfast, school activities, school uniforms, extended school service, and school textbooks.

The National Healthcare Security Administration (2023) reported that the current balance of the residents' medical insurance fund was 77,546 million RMB, and the cumulative balance was 753,413 million RMB. Thus, the study recommends that the central government provides free primary medical insurance for all children as the urban and rural residents' medical insurance balance matches children's medical insurance fees and does not affect the operation of the national urban and rural residents' basic medical insurance. In addition, the epidemic was declared over, and the government does not do large-scale COVID-19 tests. Thus, the health insurance fund will reduce expenditures and increase balances. Further, the fertility rate has been declining since last year, and the free child health insurance policy will reduce the financial burden on families with children in China.

The Chinese government provides the Minimum Livelihood Standard Guarantee for orphans, children with disabilities, and children in marked low-income families. Thailand provided 600 Baht per month to poor children aged 0-3 in 2016. UNICEF stated that child support grants improved children's cognitive development and health, which was an example for other Asia countries, such as China, to promote child development (UNICEF, 2019). The study recommends that the central government provide a 100 RMB child allowance for all children in line with the old age allowance in China.

Regarding services for families with children, the study recommends that the government provide free childcare, early education, and affordable home help services for families in communities. Local governments are advised to provide enough funds, training, and support for children directors and social workers to improve their professional service abilities and supervise their service qualities. The childcare and early education services are advised to be free and easily accessible, and the home help service is affordable for families in communities.

Empowered Child Welfare Legislation and System

The study adopts a comprehensive legislative mode to formulate the Child Welfare Law to lead the child welfare affairs, as the related child welfare policies or programs were low and lacked uniformity in China. Orphans and children with disabilities are core subjects of social welfare policies in mainland China. Recently, the government developed social policies to support left-behind children and children in difficult circumstances. However, there is very little child welfare for all children in China. Most scholars agree that China has reached the stage of building inclusive child welfare and should enact the child welfare law for all children. Compulsory education and national immunization programs are available to all children. Based

on the Child Welfare Law, there is an urgent need to develop more cash transfer and social service programs for all Chinese children.

In the study, the included left-behind children experienced lower academic performance levels. The study summarizes two strategies for family education guidance services in China (Wang & Lei, 2020). The first strategy is to empower parents' academic counselling ability by improving their parents' skills and academics and providing technical resources for families. The second strategy is to improve the self-improvement ability of parents by helping parents make rational use of family capital and social resources.

Based on the study result and the function of family education guidance services, the study recommends that the government construct a national family education guidance service system, improve the mechanism for co-education between families, schools, and communities, and provide free family education guidance services for left-behind families. Next, the government develops an online family education guidance system and provides targeted services for migrant parents. For example, the government provides nutrition guidance services, education guidance services, mental health guidance services, parenting skill training, and child-parent communication skill training services for migrant parents, acting guardians, and left-behind children via online media.

The left-behind children in this study experienced insufficient financial assistance, counselling services, child protection services, and social services. There is an urgent need to clarify who provides child assistance, care, and protection services. The study recommends that the children's directors take the responsibility of assisting, caring for, and protecting rural left-behind children and regularly report their work to the village committee and local child protection department. The study recommends the children's director as the child and family-related service provider for children and families in communities.

The study also suggests that the children directors should promptly check the livelihood security, family guardianship, and schooling of rural left-behind children, submit the information to the township governments (street offices), and update it regularly. Next, the children's directors should guide guardians and acting guardians to sign a confirmation letter of delegated guardianship, supervise and guide the guardians (acting guardians), and urge them to fulfill their fostering obligations and guardianship duties by the law. Furthermore, the children directors should regularly visit left-behind children who experienced poor guardianship, dropped out of school, and are ill to provide guardianship guidance, spiritual care, returning to school and household registration services, and other caring services. Suppose children and families align with social assistance and social welfare policies. In that case, the children's directors should inform them of the contents and the procedures for applying for social assistance and assist them in applying for social assistance.

Special Social Services for Left-Behind Children

The study stated that the involved left-behind children reported a low level of academic performance and health promotion behaviours. They are the targets of school social work services, a crucial way to promote children's educational achievement and health. The study adopts a full-service school perspective and recommends schools to open on weekends and vocations to provide service for children and families to improve children's academic achievements, reduce the drop-out rate, and promote health related behaviours. The study suggests that school social workers adopt a holistic approach to create a safe school environment, a group approach to promote educational support and health related behaviours, and an individual approach to promoting children's special needs through casework, case management, or counselling. The home-school liaison provides extracurricular activities and home visits to support left-behind families and assists families in improving participation in school activities and promoting health related information and behaviours.

Next, the included left-behind children need to promote coping strategies and activity engagement. The study introduces a full-service community school perspective to provide service for left-behind children and families after school. It may reduce children's drop-out rates and improve children's academic achievement, coping strategies, and activities engagement in neighbourhood. The full-service community schools provided educational enhancement and health support programs for children and their families before and after school, evenings, weekends, and summers, which significantly improved children's academic achievements attendance and reduced drop-out rate, promoted communication between families

and schools, and empowered safety and engagement in the community, thus, promoting left-behind children's academic performance, coping style, and participation in neighbourhood context.

Conclusion

Pocket money, child welfare for education, child protection services, coping strategies, and participation in neighbourhood activities are the core subjects that improve the well-being of children left behind. The researchers recommend that the central government increase public spending on children's education, health, and family welfare and services to reduce child poverty, enhance children's welfare, meet children's multiple needs, and promote children's well-being. Children's well-being depends on families, society, government, especially the child welfare system because children are vulnerable and highly affected by contexts where children experience. The deficits of material, physical, and educational needs experienced by children affect their development from childhood to adulthood and throughout their lives. The government creates a safe, loving, fair, and kind environment for children, promotes effective communication and close relationships between children and parents, peers, teachers, and neighbors, reduces risk factors such as poverty and bullying, and provides children with appropriate cash transfer and sufficient social services that will contribute to children's well-being, promote children to be prosperous and responsible adults, and, ultimately, benefit the country's prosperity and long-term development.

References

- Bastos, A., Fernandes, G. L., & Passos, J. (2004). Child income poverty and child deprivation: An essay on measurement. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 31(11/12), 1050-1060. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03068290410561168>
- Bastos, A., & Machado, C. (2009). Child poverty: A multidimensional measurement. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 36(3), 237-251. <https://doi.org/10.1108/03068290910932738>
- Ben-Arieh, A., Casas, F., Frønes, I., & Korbin, J. (2014). *Handbook of child well-being: Theories, methods, and policies in global perspectives*. Springer.
- Bradshaw, J., Hoelscher, P., & Richardson, D. (2007). An index of child well-being in the European Union. *Social Indicators Research*, 80(1), 133-177.
- Bradshaw, J. (2015). Subjective well-being and social policy: Can nations make their children happier?. *Child Indicators Research*, 8(1), 227-241. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-014-9283-1>
- Chien, C. W., & Lin, C. Y. (2021). Community participation of school-age children: Who is at risk of restricted participation?. *Physical & Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics*, 41(5), 447-463. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01942638.2021.1900489>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach* (5th ed.). SAGE.
- Damodar, P. (2017). *An analysis of the determinants of remittances and effect of remittance on expenditure behaviour and child welfare in the households of Nepal* [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Reading.
- Fan, X. H., & Fan, Z. Y. (2020). Parent-child relationship and general well-being among rural left-behind children: Psychological capital as a mediator and pocket money as a moderator. *Chinese Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 03, 624-627. <https://doi.org/10.16128/j.cnki.1005-3611.2020.03.039>
- Gross-Manos, D., & Bradshaw, J. (2022). The association between the material well-being and the subjective well-being of children in 35 countries. *Child Indicators Research*, 15, 1-33.
- Imms, C., Granlund, M., Wilson, P. H., Steenbergen, B., Rosenbaum, P. L., & Gordon, A. M. (2017). Participation, both a means and an end: A conceptual analysis of processes and outcomes in childhood disability. *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, 59(1), 16–25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dmcn.13237>
- IOM. (2022). *World migration report 2022*. <https://publications.iom.int>.
- Kosher, H., & Ben-Arieh, A. (2017). Religion and subjective well-being among children: A comparison of six religion groups. *Children & Youth Services Review*, 80, 63-77. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2017.06.049>
- Land, K. C., Lamb, V. L., Meadows, S. O., & Taylor, A. (2007). Measuring trends in child well-being: An evidence-based approach. *Social Indicators Research*, 80(1), 105-132. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-006-9023-0>
- Li, Z., Liu, H., & Jiang, Y. (2023). Equity incentive, separation of two rights and corporate performance: research on corporate governance based on two types of agency costs. *Journal of Accounting, Business and Finance Research*, 16(2), 93–109. <https://doi.org/10.55217/102.v16i2.659>
- Moore, K. A., Theokas, C., Lippman, L., Bloch, M., Vandivere, S., & O'Hare, W. (2008). A microdata child well-being index: Conceptualization, creation, and findings. *Child Indicators Research*, 1(1), 17-50.
- National Bureau of Statistics of China. (2022). *Statistical yearbook in 2022*. <http://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/ndsj/2022/indexch.htm>
- National Bureau of Statistics of China. (2023). *Statistical yearbook in 2023*. <https://www.stats.gov.cn/sj/ndsj/2023/indexch.htm>
- National Bureau of Statistics of China. (2022). *The monitoring survey report of migrant work in 2021*. http://www.stats.gov.cn/xxgk/sjfb/zxfb2020/202204/t20220429_1830139.html
- National Healthcare Security Administration of China. (2022, June 8). *Statistical bulletin on the development of the national health security service in 2021*. http://www.nhsa.gov.cn/art/2022/6/8/art_7_8276.html
- National Healthcare Security Administration of China. (2023, July 10). *Statistical bulletin on the development of the national health security service in 2022*. http://www.nhsa.gov.cn/art/2023/7/10/art_7_10995.html
- Noralina, O., & Siti Hajar, A. B. A. (2017). Poor children in Malaysia: Their index of objective well-being. *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 17, 8-21.

- OECD. (2023). *Social expenditure database (SOCX)*. <https://www.oecd.org/social/expenditure.htm>
- OECD. (2023). *Family benefits public spending (indicator)*. <https://data.oecd.org/socialexp/family-benefits-public-spending.htm>
- OECD. (2022, October 03). *Education at a glance 2022 OECD indicators*. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/3197152ben.pdf?expires=1690866740&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=5B58B6516807BA0B1A2AD447AC9A5F3B>
- Oliver, N., & Dagmar, K. (2019). Social ecological measures of interpersonal destructiveness impacting child subjective mental well-being: Perceptions of 12-year-old children in 14 countries. *Child Indicators Research*, 12(1), 353-378. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-018-9542-7>
- Simpson, K., Adams, D., Bruck, S., & Keen, D. (2019). Investigating the participation of children on the autism spectrum across home, school, and community: A longitudinal study. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 45(5), 681–687. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.12679>
- Siti Hajar, A. B. A., Rezaul Islam, M., Sabri, S., & Noralina, O. (2021). Material deprivation status of Malaysian children from low-income families. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 38, 139–148. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-020-00732-x>
- The Ministry of Civil Affairs of China. (2018). *Chart: The data of rural left-behind children in 2018*. <https://xxgk.mca.gov.cn:8445/gdnps/pc/content.jsp?mtype=4&id=1662004999979993614>
- The Ministry of Finance of China. (2023, March 27). *The central-level expenditure budgets in 2023*. http://yss.mof.gov.cn/2023zyczys/202303/t20230327_3874921.htm
- The State Council of China. (2016, February 4). *The State Council's opinions on strengthening the care and protection of rural left-behind children*. https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2016-02/14/content_5041066.htm
- UNICEF. (2013). *Child well-being in rich countries: A comparative overview*. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/683-child-well-being-in-rich-countries-a-comparative-overview.html?PageSpeed=noscript>
- UNICEF. (2019). *Global perspectives on the Chinese experience: An overview of UNICEF's collaborative projects in China*. <https://www.unicef.cn/media/8311/file/unicef-in-china-and-beyond-cn.pdf>
- UNICEF. (2020). *Worlds of influence: Understanding what shapes child well-being in rich countries*. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1140-worlds-of-influence-understanding-what-shapes-child-well-being-in-rich-countries.html>
- Wang, C. Y., & Lei, W. P. (2020). An analysis on the contents and features of migrant family education guidance services in the United States. *Studies in Foreign Education*, 47(08), 28-41.
- World Bank. (2017). *Migration and remittances: Recent developments and outlook*. <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/992371492706371662/MigrationandDevelopmentBrief27.pdf>.