Left-behind Children in China

A qualitative study about the experience of left-behind children concerning their childhood

Gong Ming
Yu Xinlu
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Handledare: John Lilja
Examinator: Pia Tham
Abstract

The overall aim of the thesis is to explore the negative life experience of left-behind children in a dynamic and integrated perspective taking left-behind children, their guardians, parents, school and other social communities into consideration. It explores the current situation of some left-behind children in China, and discusses the causes and negative effects on children’s comprehensive development. A qualitative research method has been used because of the in-depth outcome accessible through face-to-face interview. Three left-behind children in different family compositions and one teacher were interviewed. The outcome of this study is discussed in multiple dimensions to explore consequences of left-behind children in China. The results suggest that parents’ migration can lead to more serious problems for the children than expected. The management of left-behind children requires concerted efforts from various social systems, not only parents, schools, children welfare center, and the whole nation, otherwise it would worsen deteriorated social issues.

Key words: left-behind children, children wellbeing, social welfare, parental absence
Acknowledgment

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1.0 Introduction

As early as 1990s, after reform and opening up of China, a large amount of parents migrate nationally or internationally for better work opportunities and education resources, leaving their children under the care of grandparents or other relative members in the rural areas in China. Those children are called “left-behind children” (Xie, 2010) who can be easily understood as children who are away from their parents and left in the countryside. They are also the first generation of left-behind children in China. With the development of economy in China, a large flow of young labor from rural areas to economic developed areas occurred in order to seek for an opportunity to have a job (Xie, 2010), similarly leaving the children at home. The economic boom can best explain the increasing number of migrant workers. Consistent with National Bureau of Statistics 2010 population censuses, the data from Yaolan (2011) shows that the number of China’s rural left-behind children is more than 60 million. Of these children, 53.25 percent were taken care of by single parents, 42.8 percent of these children’s both parents go out at the same time. 85.92% left-behind children were taken care of by their guardian, children who were taken care of by other relatives accounted for 10.7%, and 3.38% of left-behind children did not have guardian. The authors found that the number of left-behind children increases with the advent of boom in economy. Most of the left-behind children are at the age of 1-18, which requires wide supervision of parents. According to the previous research (Xie, 2010), left-behind children are more prone to drop out of school, take up employment at earlier age and join the new migrant flow, and some of them could get on board crimes due to cumulated depression and anxiety that could have been timely observed by parents. Currently, China is facing serious social issues caused by the increasingly unregulated left-behind children. Therefore, the authors aim to explore systematic solutions to take care of left-behind children.
1.1 Definition of concept

According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2013), left-behind children refer to “children who live in their original domicile, but do not live together with their parents, as either one parent or both parents have migrated”. Social researchers make the definition in a more detailed way as minors under the 18 years old who cannot go out with their parents for working, business or other activities and stay in the countryside taken care of by grandparents, single parent (particularly father) or living alone (Xie, 2010). To make consistent study on left-behind children and be consistent with the statistics standard in National Bureau of Statistics of China, in this thesis we define left-behind children to be those who are aged from 0-18, left alone or live with neighbors, paternal grandparents, aunt or cousins in the rural area since their parent have to work in the urban areas in the trend of industrialization and urbanization.

1.2 Aim and research questions

Our aim is to study the experience of left-behind children concerning their childhood and explore possible solutions through education systems.

Sub questions:

1. Which problems do these children face when being separated from parents?

2. What effects has the separation from their parents on these children?

3. In which way could schools help the left-behind children?
1.3 Essay Disposition

The second chapter is mainly about background exploration. The authors will generalize current situation then comparisons in left-behind children welfare are made between European countries and China. In the third chapter of earlier research, the authors will summarize previous researches that have been done in terms of left-behind children. Most research cover reasons for the phenomenon of left-behind children and left-behind children’s negative life experience. Then, the essay is based on profound theories including attachment theory and systems theory. Attachment theory will be fully explored to analyze the negative consequences of growing up without parents’ presence. Systems theory will be used in the discussion on children’s relationship with schools, neighbors, parents and other communities; also how concerted and integrated solutions can be brought up. The fifth chapter is about methodology; the authors employ a qualitative method and have made interviews with three left-behind children with different family compositions, and one teacher to explore the experience of left-behind children concerning their childhood. Followed are research design, the process of research, sample, validity and reliability, ethical considerations and limitation of the research. Chapter ten will present the result and analysis. Chapter eleven will discuss the result and compare with earlier research in both methodology and findings. Also, recommendations will be made to better coordinate social organizations, government and individual responsibilities. Finally, it will have reference list, and appendix.
2.0 Background

2.1 Current situation of left-behind children in rural China

Recently, there are more and more left-behind children in China due to the increasing number of migrant workers with the development of Chinese economy and urbanization. On closer examination, with the advent of migrant workers going out for work, their children in the hometown have become a new special group that is labeled as “left-behind children”. Their parents only come back home six months or even once a year at Spring Festival. According to the data published by the All-China Women’s Federation, the number of left-behind children in China’s rural areas has exceeded 61.03 million until 2013. As is vividly shown in figure 1, the proportion of left-behind children is 21.88 percent of all children in China.

Figure 1: Number of left-behind children in China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>0-2 years</th>
<th>Pre-primary</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Junior Secondary</th>
<th>Senior Secondary</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of rural left-behind children (millions)</td>
<td>11.72</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>19.53</td>
<td>9.95</td>
<td>8.13</td>
<td>61.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Children (millions)</td>
<td>45.06</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>84.54</td>
<td>46.52</td>
<td>57.59</td>
<td>278.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>left-behind children/ total number of children in China</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21.88 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resources from: All-China Women's Federation, 2013

It should also be noted that most of the left-behind children are at their schooling age, which could cause serious challenges to qualified education. As we can see from figure 1 that most of left-behind children still attend school before primary school at a total of 42.95 million, which is 70.37% of left-behind children. However, a lot of them chose to abandon school at the stage of junior secondary or senior secondary school as we can see from figure 1 that number of left-behind children is decreasing after primary school. In this case, they become new generation of migrant workers and continue to face the challenges of rural-urban balance.

Also, another issue that we discover from statistics on left-behind children in China is that a total of 61.03 million of children do not live with their parents. Most parents only visit home at Spring Festival, a traditional family reunion in China. 75% of parents come back home once a year and 20% twice or more each year. According to National Bureau of Statistics, 2010 Population Censuses, almost half of them do not live with either parents and are taken care of by grandparents or other relatives (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Family Structure of left-behind children (million)

However, grandparents of that generation had limited access to schooling and it is reported that half of them only have primary education level, what is worse, 70% of the grandparents have to be responsible for household other than taking care of the children (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2013). Besides, researchers pointed out the “mutual guardianship” issue, which refers to the left-behind children have to take care of their guardians rather than care receivers (Lv, 2007) are growing seriously recently. In this way, it might be difficult to help left-behind children with qualified life, health and care not to mention education.

2.2 Comparative performance of left-behind children welfare

Left-behind children have become one of the most emergent issues facing China’s social advancement. Chinese government and related organizations have initiated many programs or policy aiming to solve the issue. Firstly, to better involve local government in the project, the care of left-behind children has been added as an indicator for local government performance in the initiation of “New Countryside Construction” and “Innovation in Social Management” (NPC & CPPCC annual sessions, 2012). In 2003, the office of the Chinese State Council has issued “Working Views about on Further Doing a Good Job of Compulsory Education for Children of Migrant Farmers”, that report provides, the children of migrant farmers should be managed by the local government which migrant farmer working is (Huang, 2009). There are also many schools that have been established for migrant labor’s children, and exempt tuition fee for children. Some provinces have already set up specific teams or care centers to facilitate the wellbeing of left-behind children. Such as, 20 after-school care centers were established in Jilin province, a northeastern province in China to help local left-behind children. The center serves professional services and functions as a replacement of family or parents. Secondly, the Chinese government tries to promote the development of economy in rural area, efforts to reduce the gap of economic development between the rural and urban areas. The government
vigorously promotes the development of rural industry; they try to make the farmers can find a job in the countryside (Huang, 2009). At the same time, it also can make more children to feel the warmth from their family. Also, China has recruited more social workers and trained them to provide professional counseling to left-behind children in rural areas. According to the 2013 OECD report, Chinese government’s expenditure on social service grew 24% from 2008 to 2012.

Even though China tries to involve related departments into the projects, including local government, communities, and organizations, the overall outcome did not seem positive considering the large amount of left-behind children. China has been reported as a country with the largest population of left-behind children (Pissin, 2013) and it is hard to meet the requirement of all the left-behind children. For example, there are over 30,000 left-behind children in Jilin province, 20 after school care centers obviously cannot cover all the left-behind children and ensure their positive development. What is more, the origins of left-behind children can be dated back to the household registration system that prevents parents bringing their children with them into urban areas. Social benefits including health care and education resources can only be accessed in the registered location, which means when parents bring their children with them, children are not entitled to same social benefits as children in urban areas. Regarding this issue, China’s vice minister of public security pointed out that “migrants have virtually no hope of becoming residents in the country’s biggest cities any time soon” (Cunningham, 2014). The limitation on left-behind children’s entitlement in urban areas will still be an obstacle to children’s development and a big issue in China’s left-behind children social welfare.
Compared to other developed countries, both the number and quality of social organizations are missing. In developed countries with frequent flow of migrants, “left-behind children” are supported and favored by international, national and regional NGOs, local communities and philanthropic individuals (Pissin, 2013). The welfare for left-behind children has been systematically developed in developed countries, such as Denmark, Finland, Netherland, Switzerland and UK. According to the survey conducted by UNICEF (2010), those above five countries have ranked top 5 countries that lead the way of left-behind children welfare in three dimensions material well being, education and health to meet the ideal of “No children left behind”. In UK, there are international agencies to help with children whose parents work across the national border, national agencies taking the lead on exploring children protection issues, community level family interventions regarding the requirement of left-behind children. Besides, there are various sources of funds to promote left-behind children projects including government, private organizations or United Nation (Revers, 2013). Also, people and related organizations in UK cooperate and integrate “children protection” system (Revers, 2013) to cope with the left behind children issue.

Admittedly, China has made achievements in coping with left-behind children issue, however, compared to the developed countries with better social welfare on the whole, there are integrated organizations or centers needed to be established, the household registration system needed to be adjusted, concerted efforts from the whole society are expected otherwise, the neglect of left-behind children could lead to serious social consequences.
2.3 Negative consequences caused by parental absence

The negative responses of left-behind children to surrounding environment or unequal treatment from the society according to previous reports or studies draw our attention. There are growing social concern on the negative consequences of migrant workers and left-behind children. Academic studies show that left-behind children are prone to develop psychological issues, defective characteristics and aggressive behaviors (Fan, 2009), sometimes they are even labeled as “Children at and as risks” (Pissin, 2013). The Wall Street Journal used to cover the report of left-behind children being silent to neighbors, feeling depressed with cousins or relatives, some of them would even committed suicide due to emotional deprivation with parents. Left-behind children miss their parents and 84% children’s biggest concerns “want their parents back as soon as possible” and 42% found “it hard to talk to anyone when you feel bad” (Cunningham, 2014). They are excited about parent being at home during Spring Festival and go depressed when parents have to go back to urban area, a few of them would show understanding of parents’ hardship. The previous study and journal reports show great concern about left-behind children’s wellbeing and psychological development. Left-behind children’s miserable life experience, unequal social treatment and emotional sufferings can all attribute to the unintended economic boom and unbalanced social resources distributed.
3.0 Previous Research

3.1 The causes of left-behind children

With the booming of the economy after reform and opening up in China, many of rural people come to urban areas for better job opportunities. On the one hand, a large amount of rural people come to city, and it has increased the labor of the city. On the other hand, it also makes closed rural people know the different life between rural and urban areas (Xie. 2010). Because rural parents go to city for better jobs, they give up the responsibility of taking care of their children, and lead to the helpless left-behind children at home. But why this part of migrant parents did not go to city with their children? The emergence of left-behind children can be attributed to internal and external reasons according to earlier researchers.

3.1.1 External causes

Migrant parents leave their children behind not because they are subjectively willing to, but because their children do not have access to social welfare such as schooling and health care in urban areas due to the household registration system exclusive to China. Household registration system (Xie. 2010) stipulates that people only have social benefits in registered places and social welfare is different between rural area and city. Under this system, many of rural children cannot go to school in the urban areas, unless they pay the temporary schooling fee. So, household registration system is regarded as an important reason for left-behind children since rural people cannot afford the extra expenses for their children’s living.
3.1.2 Internal causes

In rural area of China, most families are relying on the contracted land (Xie. 2010), and farming. So, the harvest of land has become material foundation that the whole family live on. Almost every family member has to participate in farm work, which makes the parents difficult to consider the needs of the children’s normal study (Xie. 2010). But with the development of economy, keeping the basic requirement of family life has become more and more complicated. So, many parents will choose go out to work, and leave children at home for farming. The parents’ ignorance the important of education also becomes the internal factor of left-behind children (Xie. 2010).

3.2 Effect on the increasing left-behind children

The large-scale effect of left-behind children has been paid special attention by more and more people in China. Previous academic researches and empirical studies mainly focus on three aspects in terms of effect of the increasing left-behind children.

3.2.1 The education of left-behind children

As we mentioned before, most parents leave their children at the age of their compulsory education, especially primary school. This period of time, claimed by Ye & Murray (2005) could be decisive in children’s value and interest in school. The absence of parents will lead to ineffective guidance and management of their studies (2005), and even negative consequences in their future life.

A large amount of investigations show that the proportion of housework or farm work left-behind children has to burden increase after parents’ migration. On the contrary, 57% of left-behind children admitted that they had to do more housework than before,
of which almost 10% have never done housework before (Ye & Murray, 2005). The consumption of time on doing housework or farm work will absolutely reduce their energy, time and efforts in homework, which could be a critical reason for their worse performance at school. Many children even give up the schooling because of more and more worse performance in school and peer pressure.

Besides, the ability of guardians has significant effect on the supervision of left-behind children’s education. Left-behind children at the primary school phrase need to be taught positively and encouraged timely. Guardians have to widely broad their views. However, as we mentioned in the background information, of all the 61.03 million left-behind children, 28.53 million do not live with either of their parents. They are guarded by other family members, grandparents mostly, other relatives, neighbors or live alone. As of grandparents, most of them received limited education compared to the parents’ generation, and they are not able to supervise the children to complete their homework. What is worse, some grandparents cannot realize the importance of education and children are taught to leave school earlier or take up employment at earlier age after middle school. Also, left-behind children are mostly in rural areas in China, in which education facilities and staff are insufficient. Less care from the teachers or related people will also lead to school-weary, frustrations and less motivated left-behind children (Xinhua News, 2010).

3.2.2 The emotional and psychological development

Various researches have been focus on the emotional, psychological and social intercourse of left-behind children. It is well acknowledged that the missing parental guidance and improper management are unbeneﬁcial to children’s wellbeing, also can lead to a wide range of psychological issue and social problems. They show tendency
to vulnerable self-esteem, missing self-confidence, looser relationship to parents, silent or less communicative to neighbors (Ye & Murray, 2005).

Communications with parents are limited due to less developed communication device in rural areas, and the possibility of performing face-to-face communication is reduced because of the less frequency of parents coming back home. Therefore, it is difficult for left-behind children to turn to parents for help whenever needed. Most of the studies show that the frequency of communication between parents and left-behind children is quite low or even none at all (Lu, 2011). The missing contact and communication with parents cannot be replaced by any other kind of communication. What is worse, it turned out that left-behind children are less communicative to neighbors, communities, and classmates in school. Less than 20% of left-behind children are willing to share personal feelings with their guardians and over 30% shows that they would love to keep the emotional to themselves (Lu, 2011). In the long run, left-behind children even developed loser relationship with their parent, which means they are not active and communicative with their parents either. Those unsocial behaviors will lead to serious psychological problems. According to a survey conducted in southern coastal cities in China, 19.6% of left-behind children feel inferior to others, 11.4% feel discriminated and 9.5% feel abandoned (Xinhua News, 2010).

Other researches illustrate that the left-behind children show the tendency of anxiety and depression, which will lead to inappropriate social behaviors. The absence of parents makes it difficult for left-behind children to build a sense of security and trust with people around them. Most of them suffer from beating or humiliation but choose to keep silent (Lu, 2011) because they do not feel safe without parents around. In the long run, they could probably develop unsociable behaviors, get involved with delinquent people, and become “children at and as risk” (Pissin, 2013). Therefore, the
long term missing parental guidance results in vulnerability in left-behind children’s behaviors, some could be end up with criminals.

3.2.3 Health and care for daily life

Health and nutrition issue has been under discussion by previous researchers. It is well acknowledged that nutrition plays an important role in children’s development. Comparative studies on intake nutrition and health situation have been carried out by Chen (2000) between left-behind children and children living with parents and she pointed out that malnutrition occurred easily and frequently to left-behind children guarded by grandparents compared to children who were cared for by their parents. Consistent with Chen’s findings, Luo, Peng and Zhu (2008) furthered that the total food intake was far less than that of normal children due to limited economic conditions and inappropriate caregivers of grandparents, the growing retardation and low body weight could lead to serious problems such as anemia, diabetes and heart diseases.

4.0 Theoretical perspectives

4.1 Attachment Theory

Attachment theory is jointly developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth and refers to the dynamic relationship among humans. Attachment theory originally aims to explain how caregivers’ usually parents’ relationship with children can influence children’s development (Holmes, 1993). In early years, attachment relationships are considered to be dominant and most influential in a child’s life (Grossman, 2005). Their intimated relationships with parents can effectively form appropriate perceptions of social environment, including culture, motives, confidence and safety.
When infants become to explore new adventures, they take advantage of the attachment figure, namely parents. Parents’ positive responses will lead to appropriate guide to the development of children’s emotions, perception, ways of thinking and behaving in other close relationships developed throughout the whole life. Later, attachment theory is applied to the adolescent and childhood with the expansion of social experience. The inclination of self-reliance is getting involved with more social relationships and increasing with the advent of complicated social environment. At this stage, young children’s earlier experience of supportive parents and sensitive responses will bring a positive pathway for sociable behaviors, and proper psychological development (Grossman, 2005). On the contrary, as was vividly stated by Bowlby (1988), children who have less engaged, “unresponsive, insensitive parents are more likely to develop along a deviant pathway that is incompatible with their physical and psychological development and that will make them vulnerable to social shifts. As far as researchers are concerned, left-behind children could fit the case with no exceptions.

Due to left-behind children grow up without guardianship or parenting, most of them will face serious living and development problems, posing a severe challenge to social management of rural areas in China. Some researchers found evidence in the application of attachment theory to left-behind children. Left-behind children’s unhealthy behaviors, such as criminals, suicide, abuse, emotionally damaged, and depression could be related to earlier negative experience or long time separation from the attachment figure, mainly parents (Artico, 2003). Therefore, the analysis of left-behind children could be more comprehensive and detailed in the light of attachment theory.
4.2 System Theory

System theory was firstly established by Karl Ludving von Bertalanffy in 1955 and was regarded as a powerful framework for understanding human development in the case of constant changes and complexity (Chen & Stroup, 1993). Different from other theories, it does not involve a body of knowledge but highly abstracted assumptions that can be applied in various fields of study to facilitate comprehensive understanding of dynamic system (Greene, 2008). System theory functions as analytical framework to explain, predicting, and integrate phenomenon in human society. When the concept of ecological environment came to research, system theory becomes obvious. It argues that human behaviors cannot be judged separately but viewed in the ecological environment that individuals are in. In additional, people’s behaviors are greatly influenced by surrounding communities and families.

System theory was developed into different research fields and family system theory has emerged from system theory by scholars who found wide applications of this theory to families and other social communities. It aims to explain complicated behaviors in an interrelated way with one another. According to family system theories, a children’s quality of life could be affected by care, support, emotional communication, encouragement and education from any family members. Consequently, changes in family composition or family structure could have significant influences in people’s behaviors (Bowen, 2004).

Children’s development cannot only be viewed from the perspective of family and individual, community and other social systems are all major determinants in promoting further development. System theory provides us a comprehensive insight into the left-behind children and their surrounding social systems. It offers great inspiration in systematic solutions to cope with left-behind children.
5.0 Methodology

The chapter of methodology is about how this research has proceeded. Which research method researchers have chosen and why they have chose it. Then it will explain the procedure used to gather the data, analyze the data related to research questions in the process of research. Finally, essay credibility and ethical standpoints are presented in this chapter as well.

5.1 Preliminary understanding

Before the commencement of the study, the researchers tried to figure out if there is preliminary understanding of left-behind children that could affect the credibility of this research. The authors’ preliminary understanding on left-behind children is that they could be more sensible and mature than other children who live with parents. Most of left-behind children know how to share the chore for their family since childhood because they tend to understand their parents’ hardship. Left-behind children are very frugal in their life, and they cherish the opportunity of study.

However, after further knowledge on literature review, journal report and earlier studies, surprisingly we found out that there are also negative consequences on left-behind children. On the basis of previous research, the authors decided to conduct an in-depth research to explore the problems left-behind children are facing after long term absence of their parents, discuss the research findings, analyze the research result through application of theories to know how those problems influence their childhood, and at last come up with concerted solutions.
5.2 Research design

Before doing the research, researchers should design the research questions and research steps to make the conclusion able to response to the aim and main questions.

The aim of this research is studying the experience of left-behind children after separating from their parents in their childhood. The authors chose qualitative method to conduct the research based on previous research experience. To obtain a deep understanding of feelings of the targeted group, the research has to be designed through qualitative study (Patton, 2002). It offers insights into the authors through face-to-face communication and responses of the targeted group. Besides, there are other researchers arguing that qualitative methods are especially suitable for vulnerable people (Lu, 2011), in this case particularly, the left-behind children. Further, qualitative interview is a dominant method to conduct qualitative research. It was used to explore social science throughout the 20th century and obtain in-depth knowledge from their informants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Regarding this research, it aims to explore left-behind children’s life experience, most of which is probably miserable, views and attitude. Through qualitative interview, the author can get deep access to the left-behind children’s feelings, attitudes, and the world they live in. Besides, authors can observe children’s emotional responses, body languages and analyze their behaviors. Face-to-face interview seems appropriate for conductors to get access to children’s stories and life experience, and at the same time get rich data information. Therefore, in this research, face-to-face interview will be dominant method to explore.
5.3 Mode of procedure

5.3.1 Selection of literature

We used a lot of literature for researching the experience of left-behind children concerning their childhood. The authors read many books and search the information of the experience of left-behind children concerning their childhood. Finally, the authors chose some of the literature, which are relative with our topic.

In this study, the authors used these following words to find literatures, which are relative with our study: *left-behind children, problems of left-behind children, attachment theory, and system theory, the situation of left-behind children in China, research for left-behind children, and social politics for left-behind children.*

The authors used the database of SAGE, Google scholar and Chinese books, because this study is researching about left-behind children in China, online sources help us find out earlier research of left-behind children. To get the latest data for current situation in China, National Bureau of Statistics of China has been accessed. For theories such as system theory, it is difficult to find its application in left-behind children or children issue, but we searched family system theory as the closest topic to cover left-behind children.
5.3.2 Sampling

Small-scale but in-depth interviews have been conducted among four selected interviewees. All of them are from Chengdu, Sichuan province. The selection of interviewees has close relationship to the themes we are trying to explore and main hypothesis we are trying to convey. The reasons for selection of our interview are as follows:

First of all, the researchers had practiced in Chengdu Women’s Federation and participated in their project about Caring for Left-behind Children in Chengdu. And the authors have been in this school to help them when we did the field practice. This school is included in this project area, and there are many left-behind children whose situation is worse than others. So, the researchers chose this school and Chengdu Women’s Federation helped us to contact this school. Then the officials in the school carefully studied the themes, analyzed different situation for every left-behind child at their best knowledge, and helped select a well-experienced teacher and three left-behind children from the same school. Most importantly, they fall into different categories that we are hoping to get different conclusion. Three of them are left-behind children with different family compositions; one living with aunt, one with her brother and one living alone. This essay is trying to explore whether they develop different behaviors or occur to different issues taking their relationship with school, teachers, guardians, and classmates, parents into consideration. The last interviewee is a teacher who demonstrates great experience in working with left-behind children. We are seeking for different perspectives on left-behind children, therefore, and efforts through other social systems can be encouraged. Face-to-face interview is an effective way to conduct researches at this level and combination of theoretical study; the left-behind children issue can be best stated.
Even though the interviewed children represent different categories of left behind children, neither can they represent the whole category nor can they represent the general left-behind children. Therefore, the authors cannot generalize from the few interviews and all the conclusions are limited to certain scope.

5.3.3 Data collection

5.3.3.1 Secondary data collection

The validity of secondary data is very important and prominent, because it raises the question on validity of conclusions that are drawn from data (Don, 2010). In this thesis, our secondary data was collected from National Bureau of Statistics of China 2013 and EU welfare report. In this case, we have access to the latest data to demonstrate an authentic situation China gets currently and welfare gap with developed countries. Besides, data was also taken advantage from previous researches and literature review in terms of causes of left-behind children and negative life experience. Also, journal reports from Xinhua New are also used for explanation of negative effects caused by the absence of parents.

5.3.3.2 Interview data collection

Before the commencement of the interview, Chengdu Women’s Federation informed all interviews of the nature of the research. Meanwhile, interviewees were aware of the aim of the research to help with parents, guardians, teachers and other social organizations better solve left-behind children situation. The clear understanding of the interview will make interviews open their heart and talk deeply. Then face-to-face interviews were conducted with the four interviewees individually. In-depth interviews like this can provide rich information, which are useful for theme conclusions. The author used five open-ended questions to explore their relationships with surrounding environment, and difficulties they have in life experience. What is
more, interview can be well controlled to better avoid hard personal feelings, which means interviewers can change the topics or interview tone in case of unexpected things during the interview.

### 5.3.4 Data transcription

Interview data is recorded, transcribed, analyzed and integrated by authors in order to get accurate results.

First of all, all the interviews are recorded with a tape. The availability of portable electrical recorder made the accurate recording of interviews possible (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Two preset recorders were used to avoid technical failure during the process and also for independent analysis of two authors. During the interview, authors do not have to record the information by themselves so they can observe interviewee’s responses to certain questions or change questions when interviewees are seemed upset or uncomfortable with the topic. They are able to control the interview process. The second step is data transcription. Two authors transcribed independently with separated recorders and authors always go back and check certain words, sentences and emotion involvement in the analytical process. The third step is data comparisons, correctness and analysis among two authors and interviewees. Qualitative analysis of transcribed interview data was compared and checked firstly by two authors and then results were sent back to interviewees for confirmation. At last, data integration and categorization were conducted once interview data was confirmed. In the research, three themes are developed through the questions in the interview, and the authors analyzed different questions and answers to make them fit into different themes (See appendix 1). In this way, data was transcribed and analyzed to better serve the aim of the study.
6.0 Essay credibility

6.1 Reliability

From a traditional standpoint, reliability refers to questions yielded the same answer whenever or wherever they were carried out (Silverman, 2004, p.283). According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009, p. 244), a more contemporary standpoint concentrates on consistency and soundness of the dynamic process from aim, arguments, evidence of interview and founding. As was claimed by Klenke (2008, p.93), “reliability should be a benchmark of qualitative research”. We clearly expressed the aim and sub-questions of the essay. Interviewees were chosen according to their family composition from the list of Chengdu Women’s Federation. They are typical left-behind children and we believe in-depth interviews on them can help us reach certain results. Then during the analysis process of interview data, the authors carefully examined the questions and responses from interviewees, sent back for confirmation and categorized them into different themes to better explain the aim of the research. Conclusions are drawn from the research we did. In this way, the reliability and consistency of the research is ensured.
6.2 Validity

Validity, which is referred to the correctness, appropriateness and influences of argument or data evidence, plays an important role in the credibility of an essay. Truth of interview responses will be assessed through validity, the extent to which inquiry yields the answers (Silverman, 2004:248), that means the validity needs the researcher get the data corresponding to the research aim and the data needs based on the research aim. The authors made rigid standard in available data or argument. For example, authors will choose the latest data from National Bureau of Statistics in China to illustrate the left-behind children situation to make the correctness and strong influences of the data. Also, in the interview, authors carefully transcribed answers from interviewees because of their words limitation to express their feelings. Then with regard to the literature authors have chosen as references in the essay, quality and frequency of reference will be evaluated. Authors attempted to refer to the correct and influential researches to ensure validity of this essay.

6.3 Ethical standpoints

The authors, as well as the interviewers in the research demonstrated strong ethical and professional behaviors. We respected the willingness of interviewees for participating in the research, gave full information on the aim of research and guaranteed their privacy. For example, as we mentioned before, before the commencement of the interview, Chengdu Women’s Federation informed all interviewees of the nature of the research. The interviewees were informed that they can choose to give up or pause the interview if they do not feel comfortable with the questions since some questions may be remind them of miserable experience. At the same time, authors kept close attention to their emotional responses during the interview. Also, the authors stick to the original meaning of the interviewees and do not allow their personal opinions get involved.
6.4 Limitation of the study

This research was conducted based on a small-scale study in Sichuan, one of the provinces with emerging left-behind children issues in China. To conduct in-depth interview, only four interviewees were covered in the whole investigation process. Besides, only left-behind children and teachers’ perspectives were investigated due to the small-scale research. This study did not cover the opinions from all related participants, such as guardians and parents. Besides, neither all left-behind children’s life experience was covered nor all the efforts from teachers and education systems are claimed in the research. Different perspectives from parents and guardians should be taken into consideration when evaluating the consequences of parental absence.

Also, according to the authors’ best knowledge, the social theory has limited application on left-behind children by previous researchers. However, it is a profound and meaningful theory in our study. Therefore, maybe there are insufficient explorations on the theory. However, overall, the authors emphasized and pointed out the applicability of system theory and its directive significance in left-behind children, parents, and external ecological environment.
7.0 Results and Analysis

7.1 Brief introduction of the interviewees

Yang Huan (8 years old), Zhou Tong (13 years old), Liu Jia (12 years old) are three left-behind children who were involved in our interview. Huan is 8 years old and he is in first grade of primary school. He is living with his aunt, uncle and a younger cousin who is 6 years old in the kindergarten. His parents have been out working for four years. Tong is 13 years old and lives alone for five years without any guardians. He intends to drop out of school and took up employment. Liu Jia is 12 years old and lives with her younger brother. Her parents have worked in urban areas for two years and their neighbors take care of Liu Jia and her litter brother. Also, Li Xue is a teacher in the school that mainly consists of left-behind children.
7.2 Interview Analysis

7.2.1 Theme one: left-behind children’s perception on the absence of parents and life shifts they are experiencing

According to our interviewees, all of the interviewed children are not willing but forced to accept the truth that their parents have to go out and work in urban cities. Most of them can understand the hardships that parents are facing and they eventually support their parents who are thousands of miles away.

As Jia (12 years old) stated,

My parents have been out working for 2 years. Although I do not want my parents to go out, however, my little brother is just 5 years old, my parents want to earn more money to support the education fee for both of us. Although I hope I can live with my parents, I understand their situation. I just wish they could take care of themselves very well.

Tong (13 years old) added that,

Even though I do not want them go and I miss them, I have to understand my parents and they brought back nice gifts and encouraged me to go out and see “better part of the world” in the future.
However, reluctant understanding does not mean they can accept the truth immediately and all the time. The costs are much higher than expected. It took them much longer to perceive themselves as left-behind children and overcome their sad feelings. The situation would be even worse when they saw other children with parents around.

Huan (8 years old) said that,

*At first, I was content with my parents being far away from me. My aunt allowed me to watch TV anytime I wanted. However, as time goes, sometime, I envy my cousin so much that she can live with her parents and spend quality time with her every day and take good care of her. I also want to live with my parents. Every time, when my parents have to leave, I will not let them go. I will cry. I do not want my parents go other city to work, I wish I can live with my parents.*

When we asked whether they feel any differences when parents being away and parents at home. All of them admitted that there were huge differences physically and mentally. They have to burden lots of housework or farm work, which eventually take up most of their time for study; As Jia (12 years old ) stated that,

*I love my little brother but most of the time I have to wash clothes and shoes after school. In this way, I feel exhausted the next day at school. There was one time I even fell asleep in class. Classmates made fun of me. I felt embarrassed and shamed when talking with them.*
Another issue that was mentioned in terms of different life experience is related to psychological development of left-behind children, which is easily to be neglected by most parents. Most of these left-behind children in my case are less confident, and have more possibilities of being tolerant when conflicts occurred. The missing sense of safety resulted from the absence of parents makes them more easily to keep silent. Also, our interviews indicated that caregivers or guardians overlooked their emotional requirements. Huan (8 years old) gave an example of his experience with his aunt and cousin:

My parents usually come back during spring festival. I am very confident play with my friends or my cousin when my parents back home, because my parents are here. For instance, maybe I will speak louder than before or I am not afraid of doing things what I wanted to do. After they leave, I feel helpless and no one to talk. If I did something that make my aunt angry, like make cousin crying, they do not criticism to me but will not talk and leave me alone. Finally, I had to admit the mistake to them.

Xue (the teacher) added that,

I have seen many changes in left-behind children. They were happy, sociable, positive when their parents were around. However, being away from parents and living with other guardians made them different. They prefer to make a concession and are afraid to fight for what they want. What is worse, many left-behind adolescent took up crime because of accumulative depress.
7.2.1.1 Summary of the results

Three left-behind children described that they developed similar perceptions on their parents’ absence. None of them are willing but have to accept the fact that their parents work in the urban areas in order to better support their family. In turn, they seem to have gradually become very independent and mature compared to other children. Consequently, these left-behind children’s lives have been changed significantly. Children might be content for a short period of time, however, most of the time they also suffer from emotional shifts and physical challenges especially compared to children who live with their parents. Among the three cases, Huan (8 years old) showed more attached feelings for his parents because his cousin lived with his aunts every day, which reminded him of his own parents. In terms of emotional shifts, both of the children and teacher in the cases admitted that children face psychological pressure and behavioral constraint due to the disappearance of parents’ supports and inappropriate guidance. With respect to physical challenges, it is claimed that heavy farm work as well as housework deprived children’s happiness and nature life.

7.2.1.2 Analysis

The attachment behavior that left-behind children showed for their parents expresses children’s nature demand for parents. Left-behind children’s unwillingness of being away from their parents identified their dependency on individuals who are “perceived as better able to cope with the world” (Bowlby, 1988). Theoretical explanation for children’s attachment for parents can be traced back to attachment theory. They still have a close tie to their parents because of their age and insufficient life experience that is not enough to help them better solve problems. Just like Huan’s case, he sees his aunt’s care for his cousin every day. An 8 years’ an old child is probably not capable of dealing with the loss of parents’ love, “reasonably” partial to other children and overlooked care from his aunt. Even though left-behind children
may be content with the absence of their parents for a short period of time, or some left-behind children can encourage themselves and live positively, “attachment behaviors never disappear completely” (Bowlby, 1982). Just like Jia’s case, even though she performs higher levels of understanding and care for her parents, it does not mean she did not suffer any pain or psychological struggle. When parents are at home, children’s attachment demands are met so they can do whatever they feel comfortable with. Because they know parents will be the supportive figure in case of any unpredictable situation. On the contrary, the teacher also confirmed that, most of the time, during the absence of parents, left-behind children developed inappropriate behaviors.

In the case, the interviewed left-behind children have to face various challenges physically and mentally even though they do not want to accept the fact that parents are not able to help them around. From the perspective of attachment theory, no matter to whom left-behind children’s attachment is, the loss of that figure will lead to negative consequences (Boss, 2002). One common sense in all the four interviews is that a lot of changes are related to the absence of parents, such as more housework or farm work, and also emotional challenges to cope with self-identification and other social relationships. We will discuss later in theme two. Therefore, it is really important that interaction between left-behind children and parents can be sustained in substituted way.
7.2.2 Theme two: the negative consequences for these left-behind children

All the left-behind children interviewed concentrated on emotional and psychological problems, of which they found adapting to being left-behind child and their relationships with parents, new guardians, teachers and classmates, or other social communities even complicated and unprecedented.

As Huan (8 years old) shared his experience,

At school, higher-grade students tried to bully me, I know I should fight for my best interest but I gave up. My parents are not here so I will not get any support if something happens and I can not explain myself. At home, I do not have a good relationship with my aunt and my cousin. Neither does my aunt check my homework nor does she attend parent-teacher meeting. I feel upset and lonely. People are so busy, however, I am quite lost and do not feel like talking to anyone.

And Tong (13 years old) added that,

I used to work so hard and always be No.1 in our class before my parents tutored me. After they left for urban areas, for some reason, I made more mistakes at school and homework. It feels like it is hard to concentrate on study. Gradually teachers lost attention on me and I can not afford the loss. Eventually, I lost my temper and fight with teachers, classmates, neighbors for trifles.
Xue (the teacher), as a teacher in left-behind children school witnessed complex emotional changes and social involvement of left-behind children from the perspective of teachers. As she claimed that,

*Children at different age tend to solve their emotional problems in different ways. Younger children tend to keep quiet and avoid being noticed, they are shy and less expressive. Older children will seek to communicate more with other left-behind children and try to help each other out probably because their same experience. Of course, there are cases of fighting, unpleasant conflicts with teachers, classmates, or even guardians for some children. It all happens. Anyway, all the children have to deal with identity as a left-behind children and their feelings or emotions over time.*

As we can see from confirmation of the teacher, the difficulties and dilemmas these left-behind children in the cases face are far more than expected. Psychological and emotional problems that are failed to solve will be accumulated and lead to worse relationship with teachers (less supervision and discipline), guardians (intergeneration conflicts), and communities.

Another obvious consequence, according to our interviews, that related to parental absence is poor school performance and decreasing interest in getting educated. Various factors contributed to the decreasing interest in education, such as less time available for study, preference to migration like parents, and lack of supervision from parents.
As Tong (13 years old) stated that,

*I feel like dropping out of school and work in urban areas to be with my parents next semester because I do not see much more importance of study.*

And Huan (8 years old) added another reason that,

*My parents used to check my homework, however, my aunt never checked my homework or tutor me. I wish I could do better at school but I failed however hard I tried.*

### 7.2.2.1 Summary

As we learned from the above three cases, there seems to be many negative consequences for the children when parents leave them in rural areas. These interviewed left-behind children are less capable of handling with their emotions and psychological issues, such as Huan (8 years old). Without appropriate parental guidance, these left-behind children are more prone to be quiet, less confident and introverted. They did not show interest in any group activities and became less sociable. When conflicts occurred, these left-behind children have more possibilities of being anxious and drawing back. Their characteristics formed after parents’ migration have strong influences in their social relationships. The social relationship with teachers, classmates, parents, guardians, and other related communities becomes even more complicated. Intergeneration conflicts escalated, some left-behind children investigated did not communicate with their parents but turned to other communities such as teachers, classmates instead for help, while some of these left-behind children developed bad social relationships with all the people around and feel upset because they did not intend to do so.
Another serious issue reflected in our interview is education. These interviewed left-behind children’s decreasing interest in education is closely related to parents’ economic migration (Just like Tong). Due to the missing supervision on children’s education and insufficient discipline, left-behind children developed poor school performance.

However, in our interview, we do have an exceptional case. The left-behind girl Jia (12 years old) was positively supported by teachers and her guardians, so she is able to do well in both education and social relationships. As far as we are concerned, better encouragement and support from other social system can facilitate the improvement of left-behind children.

7.2.2.2 Analysis

Systems theory, which provides us a unique way of observing objects systematically, offers an integrated concept in dealing with left-behind children and their relationship with teachers, schools, classmates, guardians and other social communities in our cases. As was stated in Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1990), children’s development environment has to be regarded within the context of systematic relationships that form their environment. In Bronfenbrenner’s layers of relationships, changes in any layer could lead to breakdown of the whole system, which means the shifts in family compositions or poor relationships with guardians could have unexpected influences in left-behind children’s other social relationships. Therefore, when we look at left-behind children’s development, we also have to study the interaction of other environment such as school and other communities as well. In the cases, three children are living with different guardians and they developed different relationships with them, which lead to different values, views and attitude. Huan describes that his aunt did not care about him or offer any guidance on his behaviors;
his envy worsened his relationships with his aunt and cousin. Then he became less secured and silent. Tong said that he used to be the center of teachers’ attention, however, subtle changes occurred but he got nobody to communicate with since he lived by himself. Then his relationships with teachers and classmates were not well handled so he decided to drop out of school and took up employment as his parents. It will directly affect his future. The case is quite different for Jia and her little brother. She seems to have developed great relationships with her neighbors and neighbors seem to take good care of her and encourage her to stay positive with her future. So she is determined to go to college and change the current situation. Left-behind children’s relationships with their school, teachers, classmate, guardians could have destructive influences on left-behind children’s development Addison (1992). When parents have to work far away, the interviewed left-behind children do not have access to “immediate layers of relationship”--parents to communicate with, and then it is difficult for them to explore external environmental relationships. These deficiencies demonstrated influences in left-behind children’s psychological issues lack of esteem and discipline on themselves, self-confidence and constant conflicts with others, just like Tong and Huan’s case. However, since children’s development environment has to be regarded systematically, other relationships also play important roles and can overcome the deficiencies from the missing parental supervision. Just like Jia’s case, she was well encouraged by her guardian to sustain relationships with surroundings. Thus, it is not hard to conclude these interviewed left-behind children’s development has close relations with the whole system; any linkage broken in the system could bring negative consequences for left-behind children. Therefore, children themselves, parents, teachers, guardians and other communities have to offer concerted efforts to cope with the issue.
7.2.3 Theme three: In which way could teachers and education system help with the left-behind children?

Schools jointly cooperated with other government organizations are currently initiating various programs to help with left-behind children in daily life and education. Also, teachers and other volunteers try to fill in the gap of the missing parental guidance mentally.

As Huan (8 years old ) pointed out that,

> Our school will provide dormitory for those children who are living far away from school. Sometimes, there will be a few teachers to teach us, but after a while, they will leave. Our teacher said they are voluntary.

And Xue (the teacher) added that,

> Philanthropic organizations initiated “Free lunch project” in 2011, which aims to provide free lunch for left-behind children and other children in poverty situation. And also, teachers are communicative to solve left-behind children’s psychological problems and sociable issues.
In our interview, there is an exceptional case about Jia (12 years old) and her little brother. They show positive attitude in life and education, smooth relationships with guardians, teachers and classmates, aspiring value in future life.

*My parents have been out for 2 years and my neighbors took good care of me and my little brother. With the help from neighbors and teachers at school, I feel promising in my future and decide to go to college in order to better change the living condition now.*

There are a lot more events going in terms of left-behind children. Teachers are offering help in all possible ways.

### 7.2.3.1 Summary

The school and teachers that we interviewed are cooperating with philanthropic organizations, governmental agencies as well as parents or guardians to better facilitate the improvement of left-behind children’s situation. Besides, teachers explored potential issues in complicated relationships among parents, guardians and children and tried to get all of them better engaged into final settlement, such as psychological treatment, more communications, and disciplines on school relationships and so on.

### 7.2.3.2 Analysis

Bronfenbrenne’s ecological systems theory encourages school or teachers to make up the deficiencies caused by parental absence. Lv (2007) showed that left-behind children’s attachment behavior to their parents will be less urgent and frequent after they left, on the contrary, they seek to build communication and contact with school, teachers and guardians. Just like in Jia’s case, her guardian and teacher’s better
encouragement and harmony relationship plays a decisive role in her inspiring development. Compared to Jia (12 years old), Huan (8 years old) were not lucky to develope better relationships with schools or guardians, he tended to drop out or give up on himself. Therefore, more chances of communication and public activities are encouraged by teachers to increase interaction and enhance expressions.

However, as Bronfenbrenne claimed that schools and teachers could never replace the primary relationship in the immediate layer like parents can offer. Schools and teachers have to work and support the primary relationship between children and guardians or parents who can provide lifetime care for them. Any way to decrease intergeneration conflicts and emphasize the importance of parents in the development of children will become teachers’ first priority. In Tong’s case, he planned to drop out of school and take up employment in the city like what his parents did. His parents approval is obviously not an appropriate choice for a 13 years’old children. Parents may make decisions on the base of their limited knowledge or perspectives; therefore, it is the teachers’ responsibility to guide on appropriate views and attitude towards education. Besides, programs carried out on the behalf of left-behind children at any levels guardians, teachers, parents and other communities will be highly recommended by educational system.
8.0 Discussion

8.1 Summary of analytical situation of left-behind children in Sichuan

Admittedly, there are certain shortcomings with the interviews since the essay did not cover all related participants, such as parents, guardians or other organizations. However, to a great extent, it reflected how provoking left-behind children situation in Sichuan can be. Sichuan, where the interviewed left-behind children come from, is a typical immigration province in China. Large flow of migrant workers and population variety are characterized as prevalent culture in Sichuan. As far as the government concerned, such large scale of mobility will bring potential social problems (Jiao, 2011), such as instability life for left-behind children, disparity of education resources and increasing possibilities of crime etc. Even though local government initiated programs to call for return of parents, build places for left-behind children study and play after school, establish volunteers group and strength professional teachers, however, it does not significantly change the worsening situation due to the large base number of left-behind children.
8.2 Summary of the results and connection to the research questions

The aim of this thesis was to study life experience of the interviewed left-behind children and explore possible solutions through the education system to help with them. We organized this research by three sub-questions and developed into three themes, which are consistent with the aim.

(1) Left-behind children’s perception on the absence of parents and shifts they are experiencing

(2) The negative consequences of left-behind children

(3) In which way could schools help with the left-behind children? By interviewing three left-behind children with different family compositions and one teacher in the left-behind children school in Chengdu, Sichuan province, we finally got the convincing results.

First of all, the analytical results demonstrated that most of the left-behind children in our study showed attachment behaviors to their parents and were not willing to let parents leave. However, they described that they were forced to accept the fact that parents had to go out and support the family. Without parental protection and supervision, they have to face both mental and physical challenges. Attachment theory is used to analyze relationships between children and parents and attachment behaviors.

After a general introduction of left-behind children’s perception on parental economic migration, we further move on to the detailed negative consequences brought about by parental absence. Most importantly, interviewees commonly illustrate emotional and psychological issues. Left-behind children’s emotional distress, missing self-confidence, and complicated relationships with school, teachers, classmates,
guardians and parents came to our attention. Also, poor performance at school and decreasing interest in study are obviously related to the migration of parents. System theory is used to express the importance of parent in exploring left-behind children’s external development environment. The development of left-behind children has to be considered in a systematic way and involves school, teachers, and other related communities in a dynamic process. Furthermore, it came to the importance of teachers and education systems in the role of helping with left-behind children. The teacher we interviewed described that she currently cooperated with other communities to take care of daily life, education, and relationship with guardians, classmates and parents. Many teachers work on volunteer programs, family visit if children dropped out of school, and also help children with their emotional problems. Systems theory emphasizes teacher’s role in not only educating but also facilitating and enhancing parents’ role because parents are the immediate layer of children’s development layer. Further moves are expected from teachers.

This research attempts to trace and explain data from different sources and generalize an interpretation of the interviewed left-behind children. Since the situation of left-behind children is a multi-faceted process, teacher works as a facilitator, it requires integrated contribution from all related communities. Both the data and system theory verified this point.
8.3 Comparison with previous research

Compared to previous research, the most obvious difference lies in theoretical foundation. This study is based on the attachment theory and systems theory, which are two significant theories in social work fields. All the cases are explained with the two theories in detail. However, the authors did not find sound theoretical supports from previous study, especially systems theory. Only a few researchers considered it into the study of left-behind children. Attachment theory is comparatively widely accepted in research of left-behind children. The authors found it convincing and powerful when addressing left-behind children’s development environment and relationships with systems theory.

In terms of the negative consequences without parental protection, both previous researches and this study categorized consequences into education, emotional and psychological issues, daily life and social intercourse. Some researchers focused on one aspect, such as daily life or education. This research paid more attention to emotional and psychological issue and education since the aim of the research was to explore how teachers can better facilitate the improvement of left-behind children.

Most previous researchers conducted studies on left-behind children and emphasized on the importance of parents; admittedly parents play irreplaceable roles in the development of left-behind children. Similarly, this thesis also stressed the importance of parents, however, we prefer to better utilize the role of teachers and education system in facilitating left-behind children situation.

Another important aspect lies in the use of methodology. Previous researchers have used quantitative and qualitative methods with regard to their aims. When confined in one specific field, such as consequences of education, daily diet, researchers prefer to
qualitative methods to make their arguments convincing and confirmable. For general study on left-behind children, most researchers tend to use qualitative methods such as interviews, to get general conclusion.

8.4 Methodology discussion

Methodologies used in this research included literature review, secondary data from National Bureau of Statistics of China, and qualitative methods, small-scale of interview. For the literature review, most of previous study on left-behind children can be easily traced from online library or other database; however, literature on system theory and its application on left-behind children are hard to reach either for wrong subjects or pure theory without application on children. However, the most important point we seized in the research is the way of being systematic and the ecological environment that most children are facing proposed by Bronfenbrenne (1986). Relationships between left-behind children and their surrounding environment became the central perspectives.

National Bureau of Statistics of China offers us wide range of data or sources to get general information of left-behind children in China, including definition, amount of left-behind children and its proportion, family structure, distributed areas, and recent progress made by government, education systems and other organizations. A large amount of information is gathered for this research.

As was suggested by previous researchers, qualitative interview is appropriate for social fields, especially personal life experience, attitude, feelings and views. Therefore, qualitative interview is the core method of the essay. Left-behind children can be related to various social aspects, which make the investigation even more complicated than expected. To get a better vision on left-behind children’s life
experience, left-behind children and teacher were identified as interviewees. Chengdu Women Federation and officials in left-behind children school choose typical interviewees. Interviews were designed with suitable inquires. To ensure the reliability and validity throughout the whole research, authors carefully conducted the interviews, recorded, analyzed, fed back and integrated the interview data into different themes categories. Meanwhile, ethical issues were fully aware of and well handled by authors. A comprehensive understanding of left-behind children and integrated solutions can be achieved if more related interviewees (for example, parents and guardians) are involved and more perspectives are given.

8.5 Suggestions for future study

It is highly agreed by authors that future research in terms of left-behind children life experience and possible solutions that teachers and education system can explore should mainly focus on three aspects. Firstly, theoretical foundation should be developed more on system theory, which offers us integrated insights to the ecological environment of left-behind children and provokes more possible solutions. Future researches should pay more attention to left-behind children as a whole system instead of individuals. Secondly, as we mentioned, broader scale of interviews should be taken into consideration in order to get more general information. Also, for the interviewees, it is of great importance to take parents and guardians’ opinion as an analytical factor to left-behind children. Thus, overall assessment and evaluation can be based on more perspectives. Thirdly, as to the methodology, it is worth trying combination of qualitative and quantitative methods when possible.
9.0 Reference


10.0 Appendix

Appendix 1 interview questions and related themes

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interview questions developed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the main problems left-behind children are facing? Of which are related to the absence of parents?</td>
<td>1. What do you think of your parents go out to work?</td>
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<td>2. What is the different when the parents at home or not, and how to influence your life?</td>
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<td>2. What are the consequences?</td>
<td>3. If you are a left-behind children, who is provide the cost of living for you?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Can you describe about your study life, and how is the relationship with your teacher or classmates in school. Do you have conflict with your guardian? If you have, how do you deal with those conflicts?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. How can related social systems help with left-behind children?</td>
<td>5. Do you know the school or state agencies have provided which help for you?</td>
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