The association between the mental health of “Left behind children” and parent-child communication frequencies

Introduction

◆ In china, ‘Left-behind children (LBC)’ refer to those rural children who are under 18 years old and are left at home when both or one of their parents migrate to elsewhere for work (Ye & Murray, 2005).

◆ There are more than 58 million LBC in China, which draws increasing attention in the past decades (China Women’s Federation, 2013).

◆ The tremendous amount of migrant parents and lack of communications with their children bring serious problems to the children’s mental health, such as loneliness, anxiety, and depression (Asis, 2006; Gao et al., 2010).

◆ Parent–child communication plays an important role in the child development (Cohen, Richardson, & LaBree, 1994; Su et al., 2013). Studies also indicated an association between the parent-child communication frequency and children’s substance use (Kafka & London, 1991), academic achievement (Juan, 2010), and happiness (Su et al., 2013).

◆ Herein, this study focuses on the associations between frequencies of migrant parent-child communication and children’s mental health, including loneliness, society anxiety, and depression, hoping to provide suggestions or interventions for the migrant parents about caring their children’s development.

Research Questions

◆ Will there be a difference between LBC and children with present parents in mental health problems?

◆ Is enhanced frequencies of parent-child communication positively associated with the mental health of LBC?

Participants

◆ 40 LBC and 40 children with present parents aged 13 to 15 years old are selected from the Middle School of Huaiyang, located in Henan Province of China. The ratio of boys to girls in each group is 1:1.

Procedures

◆ Participants will be gathered to fill in the following questionnaires independently: R-UCLA, SAS-A, CES-DC, Communication frequency.

Measure

◆ R-UCLA: The Revised UCLA loneliness Scale will be used to assess the feelings of loneliness of children. The scale consists of 20 items (Russell et al. 1980).

◆ SAS-A: The Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A) will be used to assess children's social anxiety (LaGreca & Lopez, 1998). The scale consisting of 22 items is divided into three subscales: Fear of Negative Evaluation, Social Avoidance and Distress in New Situations, Social Avoidance and Distress-Genera, and four filler items.

◆ CES-DC: Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children (CES-DC) will be used to assess the depressive feelings of children. The scale is composed of 20 items and can be applied to children in the age range of 8 to 17 years.

◆ Communication frequency between LBC and the parents will be obtained by asking students the question like “How many times did you communicate with your parents last month”.

Conclusions

◆ This study seeks to reveal the influence of parent-child communication frequencies on LBC’s mental health in China, including loneliness, social anxiety, and depression. The results will provide advices for the migrant parents about how often to communicate with their children.

Limitations

◆ The participants in this study come from one school in Huaiyang, and could not represent all the situations in other places.

◆ The other aspects of mental health, such as lack of confidence and autism, are not investigated in this study.

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