Study on self-consciousness of migrant children in Nanjing, China

Yingyu Ge[a,b]

[a]*School of Business, Hohai University, Nanjing, China*
[b]*School of Business, JiangSu University of Technology, ChangZhou, China*

_____

ABSTRACT

Due to the economic imbalances and the restriction of household registration system, the number of floating population in China has increased year by year since 1980s. In recent years there is a tendency for the floating people to settle down, which causes more and more migrant children to follow their parents to live in cities and receive education here. Since most of the migrant family can't receive the same public service as local people, their living status, and especially their children's mental health, is becoming hot issues. Questionnaire has been designed by using The Piers-Harris Children's Self-consciousness Scale. One primary school and two Junior high schools of Nanjing were chosen. All students were investigated, and 453 migrated children were selected after data arrangement. Then contingency analysis, analysis of variance and logistic regression were used to analyze impacts on self-consciousness of migrant children. There are significant differences in various schools and families. In general, the family condition of migrant children in Hongyuan Junior high school is the best, and that in Shazhou Junior high school is the worst. Variables such as father's education, birth place, gender, grade and school can influence children's self-consciousness. But school plays a more important role than family in the development of children's self-consciousness. The results show that both family-related and school related-factors can affect migrant children's self-consciousness. A close relationship with family members can reduce the occurrence of low self-consciousness. High academic achievement is related to high self-consciousness. And teachers' care can influence migrant children's self-consciousness.

Keywords: self-consciousness; migrant children; China

_____

INTRODUCTION

There are 2.2 billion migrant people in China according to the sixth census in 2010. Because of the big economic gap between eastern China and western China, China's urban areas and rural areas, a large number of rural surplus labor forces from western and rural area choose to work in eastern cities. Some of them leave their children in countryside; others bring their children with them. Most of these migrant workers do not have consciousness and time to care about their children's mental health for lack of high educational level and heavy physical workload. So the study of self-consciousness of migrant children, an important performance of mental health, has become a hotspot in China.

The study of self-consciousness, which is understood as the way children think about themselves in relation to their attributes and abilities[1], has been of clinical and research interest for decades. In general, the curve of self-consciousness declines from primary school to junior high school, and significantly increases after puberty, but becomes decline again after their graduating from universities [2].Children aged 11 to 14 usually have the lowest self-consciousness during their whole life [3].Another study in China found that children of grade junior 1(13 years old) has the lowest self-consciousness[4].

Many factors such as family environment, school environment and social environment can influence the formation and development of children's self-consciousness. For teenagers, family environment is the most important factor

_____

[4].The evaluation of family environment of those with high self-consciousness score is better than those with low self-consciousness score [5]. Variables such as educational level, personality and family relationship will influence children's self-consciousness[6-7]. And the self-consciousness of children is different among boys and girls 8]. Some other studies found that self-consciousness has most recently been related to school success and academic achievement [9-12].

Although there are a lot of studies about children's self-consciousness around the world, such study in China is not enough due to the large population and regional difference. Furthermore, study on self-consciousness of the migrant children is even less, since migration within China is different from other countries. Some studies have already found out that migrant children's self-consciousness is significantly lower than local children's self-consciousness [13-17]. And most of such studies in China analyzed the factors of family -related characteristics rather than school-related characteristics [13][15-16]. So, this study focuses on the migrant children's self-consciousness from the perspective of both family-related and school-related factors in Nanjing, China, and tries to find out the reasons that can cause low self-consciousness or high self-consciousness respectively.

EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

This cross-sectional, questionnaire-based study was conducted in one primary school (Ninggong primary school) and two Junior high schools(Shazhou Junior high school and Hongyuan Junior high school)in Nanjing, 2011. These schools mainly accepted the migrant children in Nanjing. Questionnaire survey inquired of all students in grade 5, grade 6, junior 1 and junior 2 in these schools. Students were divided into two groups according to their household registration in every class. Then migrant children were selected and asked to answer questionnaires, and finally 453 qualified questionnaires were collected.

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-consciousness Scale (PHCSCS; Piers, 1963) is used to measure migrant children's self-consciousness in this questionnaire, which is appropriate for children in 4th grade to 12th grade with at least a 3rd-grade reading level. There are80 items to which children will respond "yes" or "no". The instrument can be group-administered [18]. According to the original calculation standard by Piers, if the total score is less than 51, then it means that the self-consciousness is low. And if the total score is above 63, then it means the self-consciousness is high. If the total score is among 51 to 63, then the self-consciousness is normal. This paper followed this division method. According to previous studies, this paper assumes that there are relationships between family-related characteristics or school-related characteristics and the migrant children's self-consciousness.

This paper assumes the migrant children's self-consciousness is correlated to their family conditions and their performance at school. So this study takes several variables like birth place, educational level of their parents, family structure and living conditions as the factors of family conditions. And this study also takes variables like different schools, grades, classroom order, academic achievement, care from teacher in charge, and experience of conflict with teacher as the factors of their performance at school. All of these variables are categorical except one. Care from teacher in charge is an ordinal variable from 1 to 5, the greater the number, the higher the degree of care is.

We also use some basic demography variables such as age (grade) and gender as the control variable.

DATA ANALYSIS

We entered questionnaire responses by using Microsoft Excel and analyzed them with SPSS version 11.5. We assessed bivariate associations between categorical variables by using the Pearson χ^2 test, or Fisher's exact test when expected cell counts were less than 5. Associations between dichotomous and continuous variables were assessed by using the *t* test. Associations between categorical and continuous variables were assessed by using one-way analysis of variance or Brown-Forsythe test when the variance is heterogeneity between groups.

We assessed independent predictors of being high or low self-consciousness with logistic regression that initially included all predictors found to have $p<0.10$ in bivariate analysis and retained predictors with $p<0.05$ in the final multivariate model. Because being low self-consciousness or high self-consciousness may cause different metal health problems for migrant children, this is done separately for low self-consciousness and high self-consciousness vs normal.

_____

RESULTS

The sample consisted of 453 students, aged 9-16 years, of whom 39.1% were female. None of the household register of the students is Nanjing. They all moved here with their parents. 47.5% of them were born in the countryside, and 80.4% of them are living in rented houses. 43.9% of the students have no separate room. And the educational level of their parents, especially of their mothers, is not high, , and the educational level of fathers and mothers is highly correlated. Less than a half of migrant children often have heart-to-heart talk with their parents.

Among all the migrant children, 30.9% attended Ninggong primary school, and others attended two junior high schools. So the sample of grade 5 and 6 is smaller than that of grade junior 1 and 2. A large number of students thought the classroom order is good, but still about 16.1% of them did not agree with that. And even about 4% of the migrant children reported having experience of conflict with their teachers.

Table 1 - family- related and school- related Characteristics among migrant children in Nanjing, 2011*

Family related characteristics		School related characteristics	
Characteristics	N (%)	Characteristics	N (%)
Birth place		Schools	
Rural	215(47.5)	Ninggong primary school	140(30.9)
Urban	181(40.0)	Shazhou Junior high school	220(48.6)
Father's education		Hongyuan Junior high school	93(20.5)
Primary school and below	101(22.3)	Grade	
Junior high school	238(52.5)	Grade 5	58(12.8)
Senior high school and above	95(21.0)	Grade 6	82(18.1)
Mother's education		Junior 1	156(34.4)
Primary school and below	198(43.7)	Junior 2	157(34.7)
Junior high school	173(38.2)	Reported conflict experience with teacher	18(4.0)
Senior high school and above	52(11.5)		
Family structure		Poor classroom order	73(16.1)
Lives with both parents	385(85.0)	Academic achievement	
Lives with one parent	53(11.7)	Front	42(9.3)
Lives with neither parent	10(2.2)	Middle	343(75.7)
Housing conditions		Back	67(14.8)
Lives in rented house	364(80.4)	Care from teacher in charge(mean ±standard deviation)**	4.37 ±0.76
Lives in owned house	71(15.7)		
Has separate room	251(55.4)		
Frequency of heart-to-heart talk with father			
Often	203(44.8)		
Occasional	203(44.8)		
Seldom	39(8.6)		
Frequency of heart-to-heart talk with mother			
Often	217(47.9)		
Occasional	175(175)		
Seldom	39(8.6)		
Denominators vary slightly for some variables due to missing values.			
** Care from teacher in charge is an ordinal variable from 1 to 5. The greater the number is, the higher the degree of care is.			

Table 2 shows the results of several assumptions about family-related characteristics and school-related characteristics. Boys are more easily to get low self-consciousness. As Zhou's research shows, the percentage of low self-consciousness of children at grade junior 1 is the highest [4]. According to the results, children who live with their parents have higher probability to be at normal level of self-consciousness. Father's and mother's educational level and the frequency of heart-to-heart talk with parents are related to the level of migrant children's self-consciousness. But characteristics such as birth place and housing conditions are not related to migrant children's self-consciousness. On the contrary, all the school-related characteristics are related to the level of migrant children's self-consciousness. Primary school or low grade students have higher probability of developing normal and high self-consciousness. And those students with outstanding achievement have higher probability of developing normal and high self-consciousness. But bad classroom order and the experience of having conflict with teachers can cause higher probability of being at lower level of self-consciousness.

_____

Table 2- Differences in self-consciousness with family-related and school-related characteristics, migrant children in Nanjing, 2011.
(Only significant characteristics are showed)

Characteristic	Children's self-consciousness level		
	low N(%)	normal N(%)	high N(%)
Total	162(35.8)	178(39.3)	113(24.9)
Control variables			
Gender*			
Boy	111(40.2)	102(37.0)	63(22.8)
Girl	51(28.8)	76(42.9)	50(28.2)
Grade*			
Grade 5	11(19.0)	23(39.7)	24(41.4)
Grade 6	17(20.7)	30(36.6)	35(42.7)
Junior 1	70(44.9)	66(42.3)	20(12.8)
Junior 2	64(40.8)	59(37.6)	34(21.7)
Family related characteristics			
Father's education**			
Primary school and below	36(35.6)	45(44.6)	20(19.8)
Junior high school	90(37.8)	93(39.1)	55(23.1)
Senior high school and above	26(27.4)	35(36.8)	34(35.8)
Mother's education*			
Primary school and below	78(39.4)	82(41.4)	38(19.2)
Junior high school	54(31.2)	65(37.6)	54(31.2)
Senior high school and above	14(26.9)	20(38.5)	18(34.6)
Family structure*			
Live with both parents	133(34.5)	162(42.1)	90(23.4)
Not live with both parent	28(44.4)	13(20.6)	22(34.9)
Frequency of heart-to-heart talk with father*			
Often	52(25.6)	76(37.4)	75(36.9)
Occasional	83(40.9)	87(42.9)	33(16.3)
Seldom	23(59.0)	13(33.3)	3(7.7)
Frequency of heart-to-heart talk with mother*			
Often	53(24.4)	85(39.2)	79(36.4)
Occasional	71(40.6)	73(41.7)	31(17.7)
Seldom	26(74.3)	9(25.7)	0(0.0)
School related characteristics			
Schools*			
Ninggong primary school	28(20.0)	53(37.9)	59(42.1)
ShazhouJunior high school	106(48.2)	82(37.3)	32(14.5)
HongyuanJunior high school	28(30.1)	43(46.2)	22(23.7)
Conflict between teachers and students*			
Yes	11(61.1)	7(38.9)	0(0.0)
No	151(34.7)	171(39.3)	113(26.0)
Classroom order*			
Bad	35(47.9)	25(34.2)	13(17.8)
Good	127(33.4)	153(40.3)	100(26.3)
Academic achievement*			
Front	4(9.5)	11(26.2)	27(64.3)
Middle	110(32.1)	150(43.7)	83(24.2)
Back	48(71.6)	16(23.9)	3(4.5)
Care from teacher in charge(mean ± standard deviation)*	4.1±0.87	4.4±0.69	4.6±0.59
p<0.05. *0.05<p<0.1.**			

Table 3 shows the result of binary logistic model. Children who live with both parents may decrease the probability of low and high self-consciousness. Children who have more heart-to-heart talk with mothers tend to have less chance to get low self-consciousness. But heart-to-heart talk with father is not significantly related to migrant children's self-consciousness. Other factors of family-related characteristics are not significant. Children's academic achievement at school is an important variable which can cause low or high self-consciousness. Migrant children with high scores of examinations are more easily to get low self-consciousness, or high self-consciousness. More care from the teacher in charge may reduce the probability of being low self-consciousness, but may increase the probability of being high self-consciousness too. Different schools and classroom order are related to abnormal self-consciousness.

DISCUSSION

This study analyzed migrant children's self-consciousness and its influential factors in Nanjing, China. For our study,

_____

basic demography variables such as gender and age(grade) are not the important variables that can cause abnormal self-consciousness, but both school-related and family-related characteristics are important for migrant children's mental health.

Different from local family, many of the migrant family members didn't live together. So the living condition is not so important as a complete family. Because of the lack of essential family function, school environment seems to be more important for migrant children. Although the Chinese government has done a lot to improve the position of migrant workers, actually there still exists discrimination even at school. So for migrant children who don't live with their parents or don't often have heart-to-heart talk with their mother, according to this study, better school environment is helpful to their mental health.

This article has studied factors that cause low self-consciousness and high self-consciousness separately, and the results showed that the reasons of low self-consciousness and high self-consciousness are different. A complete family is the most important factor in family related characteristics, and it can effectively reduce the occurrence of both low and high self-consciousness. And heart-to-heart talk with mother can effectively reduce the occurrence of low self-consciousness too, but it is not significant for high self-consciousness. So the government should do a lot to decrease restrictions of migration, and help family member to live together.

Compared to family-related characteristics, school-related characteristics seem to be more important to the development of migrant children's self-consciousness. Among them, migrant children's academic achievement is highly related to their self-consciousness [9-10][12]. Poor academic achievement leads to low self-consciousness, but excellent academic achievement has its problem as well. It can cause high self-consciousness with high probability. More care from teacher in charge can efficiently reduce the probability to have low self-consciousness, but it is also related to high self-consciousness. So, teachers and students may have paid too much attention to academic achievement. And teachers tend to give more care to good students. On the contrary, children with poor academic achievement can easily be neglected by teachers. In fact, academic achievement is important to students all over the world. And it is highly related to children's self-consciousness according to previous studies. However, our study showed that teachers may have exaggerated the effect of academic achievement in China. So, we suggest that teacher should not exaggerate the effect of academic achievement. They should take more care of those students who have problem at learning, and put more pressure on good students in order to avoid the expansion of their self-consciousness.

LIMITATIONS

Migrant children chosen in our study are from three schools with different environment. instead of a random sample of students selected from all the migrant children living in Nanjing. But there are not many schools that accepted a large number of migrant children in Nanjing. So, our result still has representativeness for migrant children in Nanjing. And some of the independent variables would have significant influence on self-consciousness if in a larger sample. With all of these questions answered by migrant children independently, their answers may be different from the actual circumstances, for the subjective judgment is different among students.

Table 3 - Independent predictors of being low or high self-consciousness of migrant children

Characteristic	Low vs normal		High vs normal	
	OR(95%CI)	*p*	OR(95%CI)	*p*
Academic achievement				
Front	0.17(0.04-0.69)	0.012	12.82(2.83-58.14)	<0.001
Middle	0.30(0.15-0.60)	<0.001	2.96(0.77-11.38)	0.12
Back	1	Reference	1	Reference
Care from teacher in charge	0.73(0.52-1.01)	0.057	1.54(1.02-2.34)	0.041
School				
Ninggong primary school	1	Reference	1	Reference
Hongyuan Junior high school	1.59(0.74-3.43)	0.23	0.49(0.24-0.98)	0.043
Shazhou Junior high school	2.95(1.52-5.73)	0.001	0.47(0.26-0.86)	0.014
Poor classroom order(vs. good)	1.98(1.01-3.85)	0.044		NS
Lives with both parents (vs. no)	0.28(0.12-0.65)	0.003	0.37(0.17-0.83)	0.016
Frequency of heart-to-heart talk with mother				NS
Often	0.24(0.10-0.60)	0.002		
Occasional	0.31(0.13-0.76)	0.011		
Seldom	1	Reference		
NS=nonsignificant.				

_____

CONCLUSION

As is known to all, children's self-consciousness is related to lots of factors such as family environment, school environment, and so on. But the situation of migrant children in Nanjing, China, is somehow different. To these migrant children, a complete family is helpful to keep normal self-consciousness. And we should not pay too much attention to children's academic achievement at school, because teachers' exaggeration on academic achievement may affect children's self-consciousness, especially for migrant children that seldom have heart-to-heart talk with their mother.

REFERENCES

[1]Meggert, S. S. Youth at risk: A prevention resource for counselors, teachers, and parents. American Counseling Association, Los Angeles, pp.93-115, **2004**.
[2]Freeman WH. Self as narrative: the Place of life history in studying the life span. State University of New York Press, New York, pp.15-43,**1992**.
[3]Marsh HW. *Journal of Educational Psychology,* v.81, n.3, pp.417-430, **1989**.
[4]Zhou Guotao, He Lingfeng. *Psychological Development and Education,* n.3, pp.37-942, **1996**.
[5]Weaver, M.D., & Matthews, D.B. *The Journal of Humanistic Education and Development,* v.31, pp.181-189, **1993**.
[6]Beane, J. Changing the self: Philosophies, techniques, and experiences. State University of New York Press, New York, **1994**.
[7]Hamachek, D. *Journal of Counseling and Development,* v.73, pp.419-425, **1995**.
[8]Marsh, H. W., & Köller, O. *Contemporary Educational Psychology,* v.29, pp.264-282, **2004**.
[9]Du Yasong, Liu Qi, Tang Huiqin et al. *Chinese Mental Health Journal,* v.13, n.3, pp.148-150, **1999**.
[10]Shi Shuhua, Zhou Ai qin, Fang Wei min, et al. *Chinese Journal of Child Health Care,* v.3, n.5, pp.293-295, **2003**.
[11]Huang Guangwen, Su Linyan, Su Qiaorong, et al. *Chinese Journal of General Practice,* v.8, n.11, pp.1433-1435, **2010**.
[12]Shi Shu-hua, Zhang Jing, Hu Mei-rong, et al. *China Public Health,* v.18, n.12, pp.1474-1475, **2002**.
[13]Shao Chaozhu, Chen Ruyou, Jin Dabin, Dong Xian. *Journal of Luoyang Teachers College,* n.2, pp.110-112, **2006**.
[14]An Qin, Jia Xiaoming. *China Journal of Health Psychology,* v.14, n.4, pp.395-398, **2006**.
[15]Sun Yongli. Psychological Analysis of the City Engagement of Exotic Employed Personnel's Children. East China Normal University, Shanghai, China, **2008**.
[16]Guo Jinhua. Study on self-concept and family parenting pattern of migrant junior middle school students. Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China, **2008**.
[17]Ma Lijun, Liang Zuyang. *Medicine and Society,* v.22, n.6, pp.61-63, **2009**.
[18]Piers, E. V. Revised manual for the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. Western Psychological Services, Los Angeles, **1994**.