Research on the Impact Factors and Countermeasures of Social Adaptation for Rural Children under the Normalization of the Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

With the global outbreak of the novel coronavirus pneumonia epidemic in 2020, the normalization of the epidemic has emerged as an inevitable reality that necessitates attention within the realms of social life and education. In this context, children, particularly those residing in rural areas, encounter unprecedented challenges in terms of social adjustment. To enhance overall levels of social adaptation among left-behind children and facilitate their seamless integration into society in future endeavors, it is crucial to undertake initial explorations for solutions that align with current rural realities. This endeavor holds immense significance for fostering healthy physical and mental development among rural children amidst the normalization of the epidemic.

KEYWORDS

Normalization of the Pandemic; Rural Children; Social Adaptation.

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The government's strong prevention and control measures have effectively contained the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020. However, given the repetitive, complex, and arduous nature of the pandemic, preparations are being made for its normalized development. Consequently, significant changes have occurred in social life and education. These include home confinement, delayed school reopening, increased interaction time between students and parents through online teaching, reduced peer interaction, and restricted activity ranges due to closed-campus life upon returning to school. Children now face growing uncertainty and pressure in their lives and learning processes. Rural children are particularly vulnerable to challenges in social adaptation due to limited social environment resources and lack of public service support. This can lead to adverse reactions in psychological, emotional cognitive, and behavioral aspects[1]. The development of children is greatly affected after experiencing major public health emergencies; therefore, it is crucial that we pay more attention to the emotional and behavioral problems faced by rural children. In this context, providing positive psychological counseling and education for rural children becomes necessary for their healthy growth.

Social adaptation refers to the process by which individuals adjust and integrate into their social environment, constituting a fundamental aspect of modern moral education and quality education. Furthermore, proficient social adaptation serves as a crucial indicator of an individual's mental well-being[2]. It encompasses the ability to acclimate oneself to social settings, effectively communicate with others, adhere to societal norms, comprehend and respect diverse perspectives, as well as establish a sense of belonging within groups. Spanning from infancy through adulthood, social adaptation permeates every stage of life. In accordance with "Decision of the State Council on Basic Education Reform and Development" (Guofa [2001] No. 21) and "Notice of the State Council on
Printing and Distributing the Outline for the Development of Chinese Women and the Outline for the Development of Chinese Children" (Guofa [2021] No. 16), enhancing adolescents' social adaptation skills and practical abilities during compulsory education is explicitly mandated in order to foster comprehensive physical, mental, and socio-adaptive development. Consequently, prioritizing rural children's social adaptation holds significant guiding implications for their holistic growth in terms of both physical health and psychological well-being. Drawing upon ecological systems theory reveals that within rural communities, families, schools, and localities constitute three primary entities directly influencing children's lives-forming interconnected microsystems that profoundly impact rural children's sociocultural integration.

For children and adolescents, this pandemic is unprecedented and is bound to have a significant impact on their mental health. Due to the uniqueness of the environment in which they grow up, rural children face different social adjustment challenges than their urban counterparts. In this case, using social support theory to build a social support network, through the support and assistance of social networks, expand and use social resources, and thereby build a social support system for rural children's social adaptation, fight for more social support, and help rural children better adapt to the social environment.

The aim of this study is to explore the current situation and factors affecting the development of rural children's social adaptation, and to develop corresponding and appropriate educational programmes to improve the lack of social adaptation of rural children, which is of theoretical and practical significance for solving the problem of rural children's social adaptation in the context of the normalization of epidemics and for suggesting corresponding intervention measures.

2. SOCIAL ADAPTATION ISSUES OF RURAL CHILDREN DURING PANDEMIC NORMALIZATION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the social adaptation level of rural children was affected, and their psychology, emotions, attitudes and behaviors underwent significant changes.

2.1. Psychological Reactions and Addiction to Electronic Products: The Pandemic's Challenge to Adolescent Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to many negative psychological reactions among adolescents, such as boredom, addiction to electronic products, stress disorder and learning anxiety. The epidemic brought more boredom to adolescents, especially high school students. Parental anxiety/depression indirectly predicted the addiction of adolescents to mobile phones and other electronic products through the multiple mediating effects of parent-child relationship and adolescent anxiety/depression. Due to the strong infectivity of the novel coronavirus, people are required to maintain social distancing and avoid close contact, resulting in social isolation and increased individual insecurity, leading to adolescent stress disorder symptoms (PTSD)[3]. In addition, the level of non-intellectual factors of adolescents changed significantly before and after the epidemic, the level of learning anxiety increased, and the level of learning enthusiasm, learning responsibility and learning willpower decreased.

2.2. Safety Anxiety and Emotional Fluctuations: The Pandemic's Challenge to Adolescents' Psychological Adjustment

During the pandemic, there is a strong sense of danger among rural adolescents and children, with more than half of the respondents feeling at risk, causing significant anxiety[4]. At the same time, the shift to online education due to the pandemic is forcing rural children to be educated remotely at home. This transition not only reduces the effectiveness of learning, but also forces them to face new challenges in adapting to learning, further deepening the generation of anxiety. At the same time, the
data show that rural adolescents score much higher than urban adolescents on negative emotions such as tension and anger, while rural children's scores on social connectedness, hope and emotional health are significantly lower than those of non-rural children, highlighting the profound impact of the pandemic on rural adolescents in terms of emotional management and adaptability[5].

2.3. Changes in Attitudes and Outlook on Life: The Differential Shaping of Adolescents' Psychological Attitudes by the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a major shock to adolescents' lifestyles and learning environments, but also has a profound effect on their psychological attitudes and life attitudes. On the one hand, the pandemic has led to differential changes in the psychological attitudes of adolescents, with the negative psychological attitudes of adolescents mainly manifesting as excessive reactions under panic, blind conformity, closed discriminatory behavior under a giving up mentality, and a giving up mentality[6]. On the other hand, in the group of junior high school students, different individuals show a significant differentiation in life attitudes. Research shows that girls, first-year junior high school students, those from complete family structures, and non-only children have more positive and optimistic life attitudes[7].

2.4. Behavioral Abnormalities and Disabilities: Changes in Adolescent Behavior Due to the Pandemic

During the pandemic, significant behavioral abnormalities, such as hyperactivity and stereotyped behavior, were observed in groups of special children. Statistics show that 43.61% of special children (including hearing impairment, visual impairment, mental retardation, speech impairment, mental disorders and multiple disabilities) are affected by the pandemic, and these abnormal behaviors have a significant positive correlation with their positive and negative emotions[8]. In addition, the pandemic's home-based isolation measures significantly reduce young people's freedom of movement, limiting their normal outdoor activities and exercise, which may not only lead to a decline in individual physical fitness, but may also exacerbate challenges in their social adaptive skills, making it more difficult for young people to meet behavioral norms, emotional regulation and social skills.

3. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF RURAL CHILDREN

According to the social ecological system theory, the influencing factors of rural children's social adjustment have been studied and the causes have been analyzed from micro, meso and macro levels for individuals, families, peers, schools and society.

3.1. Individual Factors

Basic demographic variables (gender and age, etc.), self-efficacy and self-control, self-concept[9], self-esteem[10], self-role cognition, psychological resilience, and life events and internal attribution styles of rural children are all important factors affecting their level of social adjustment[11].

3.2. Family Factors

The key setting for the social adjustment of rural children is the family, which is the microsystemic environment in which children form their sense of self-worth and identity. The quality of family relationships and family closeness are related to the frequency of parent-child meetings, effective communication, level of caregiving and parenting style. Family upbringing style and family integrity have an important influence on the quality of family education, which has a significant impact on the cognitive development, behavioral habits, values, academic adjustment and personality formation of
rural children. At the same time, the economic level of the family, the cultural level of the parents and the way they work also have an impact on the social adaptation of the children.

3.3. Peer Factors

Peer groups have spontaneous values, evaluation criteria, and communication methods that influence children's behavioral cognition, friendship cognition, and self-evaluation. The construction of peer relationships is an important indicator of children's successful integration into the social environment and the generation of a sense of identity[12]. Good friendship quality positively predicts children's level of social adjustment[13]. Some researchers also believe that peer rejection and peer acceptance are important factors in the social adjustment of rural children[14].

3.4. School Factors

School is the main place for students' learning and activities, and the teacher-student relationship, attention and management of rural children, teacher quality and equipment, home-school communication, teacher parenting style, and campus atmosphere affect the social adaptation of rural children. A harmonious and trusting teacher-student relationship is conducive to cultivating children's creative thinking and self-efficacy, and improving children's subjective initiative in adapting to the school environment. Active and enthusiastic teacher-student interactions are positively correlated with children's daily learning resilience.

3.5. Social Factors

Society is an important place for individuals to learn and master moral norms and behavioral guidelines. The level of social support, public opinion environment, infrastructure, cultural values, Rural Children's Home intervention projects, etc. all influence the social interactions and emotional states of rural children. At the same time, the connection and communication with the virtual world, the use of electronic products also affect the social adjustment of rural children. Long-term indulgence in the network leads to addiction to electronic products, which increases the incidence of negative psychological behavior in children and hinders the process of social adjustment.

4. SOCIAL ADAPTATION INTERVENTION MODEL FOR RURAL CHILDREN

The academic community has produced a large number of research findings on psychological health intervention for children and adolescents, mainly including psychological health risk management models, prevention models, psychological resilience models, elective education models, and integrated models of adolescent health risk behaviors. Among them, the psychological health risk management model introduces the risk management theory into the whole process of psychological health intervention, achieves an effective unification of identification, diagnosis and management of psychological health risks, provides opportunities for systematic and panoramic analysis and intervention of psychological health risks, and has been widely applied[15]. Among them, the risk management of rural children's social adjustment mainly follows the psychological health path, and the intervention system involves the government, community, school, family and individual levels. The representative risk intervention measures and models in existing research are systematically summarized as follows:

4.1. Government Level

Top-level guidance model. This model refers to the government's top-level guidance to solve the social adjustment problems of rural children. Specifically, the government actively improves the
social and educational security systems for rural children, focuses on building a theoretical system to promote the social adaptation of rural children, designs an educational activity system for children and youth based on local culture, and strengthens the systematic and sustainable promotion plans. For example, in the curriculum reform, the government adds a series of contents on social adaptation under the background of normalization of the pandemic to the youth curriculum.

Social care model. This model refers to the government's assumption of social responsibility to provide practical assistance to rural children with inadequate social adjustment. On the one hand, the government directs fiscal and medical resources to rural children with social adjustment disorders, enriches and refines treatment methods for social adjustment problems, such as music, art and other multi-sensory stimulation treatments, guided educational training, and purpose analysis language intervention, which can effectively improve the social adjustment status of some rural children. On the other hand, the government increases the resources for the physical and mental development of children and young people, takes various measures to prevent the occurrence of social adjustment problems, and continues to pay attention to the healthy development of children's adjustment ability.

Digital technology application model. This model involves, on the one hand, the government's vigorous promotion of the application of new digital technologies in the social adjustment intervention process, such as the application of virtual technology to rural children with autism for intervention, the introduction of multimedia technology into social stories to intervene in rural children with loneliness syndrome, thereby improving children's social adjustment levels. On the other hand, the government promotes the establishment and clarification of rural children's social adaptation electronic files, including basic information, social adaptation status and related suggestions, and tries to build an electronic file platform that integrates online social adaptation measurement, online virtual simulation, social adaptation files and social adaptation libraries, and updates children's and adolescents' social adaptation measurement technology, so as to continuously improve children's social adaptation level.

4.2. Community Level

Group counselling model. This model is an emerging way of community intervention through online groups formed during the transformation period of social work and other social organization services[16]. Specifically, the community carries out interventions for school-age children and their families in the jurisdiction in the form of surrogate parenting, neighborhood support, one-to-one support, foster care and community activities[17]. In this type of group work, community workers and volunteers help rural children in an appropriate way.

Parent classroom model. This is a cooperative and resonant model of education between the community and the children's parents. The community invites experts and scholars to explain to parents "how to be good parents" and the developmental characteristics of children at different stages, helping parents to learn suggestions that are conducive to children's growth.

4.3. School Level

Psychological guidance model. This model is manifested by teachers who select students with obvious social adjustment difficulties and carry out interviews and interventions with them, or by psychological counsellors employed by the school for diagnosis and guidance, mainly in a one-to-one form, such as using drawing psychological counselling for hearing impaired children.

Curricular model of education. This model is manifested by the medical function of the school, the vigorous promotion of positive psychology knowledge, and the implementation of vocational and labor education for rural children.
Sports integration model. This model is manifested by strengthening the construction of sports and fitness in schools, organizing a series of sports activities, forming various school sports teams, and enhancing the sense of belonging and life satisfaction of rural children.

Teacher supplementation model. This model is manifested by teachers taking on the role obligations of parents and friends for children to a certain extent, paying attention to children's emotional needs, accompanying each other, communicating sincerely and providing a sense of security.

4.4. Family Level

Positive parenting model. This model refers to improving parents' self-efficacy and marital satisfaction, consciously avoiding disputes or conflicts, reducing the frequency of conflicts and exposure of conflict behavior in front of children, improving family intimacy, providing more supportive emotional concepts, actively regulating emotions, improving mindfulness levels, and strengthening family protection for children.

Task-centred model. This model refers to designing case-based service strategies for children's specific social adjustment problems, relying on families to provide case-based psychological counselling and support for rural children, and also focusing on training and education of rural children's caregivers.

Online parent-child communication model. This model refers to parents and children achieving "presence" through online chatting, thus creating an intimate family environment for children and adolescents, especially those left behind.

Residential adaptation model. This model refers to parents expanding the family living space and maintaining the stability of the residence to help children improve their social adjustment.

4.5. Individual Level

Self-intervention model. This model means that children adjust their social adaptation status on their own, improve their psychological quality, strengthen their psychological resilience, actively cope with adversities or obstacles, and also strengthen their physical fitness and engage in daily physical exercise.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SOCIAL ADAPTATION INTERVENTIONS FOR RURAL CHILDREN

5.1. Individual Level: Self-improvement and Psychological Adjustment

Rural children should first strive to improve their own qualities, take a positive view of life's injustices, challenges and difficulties, learn to protect themselves, adjust their mental states, learn to alleviate various pressures of study, and improve their psychological endurance. Secondly, they should learn the skills and methods of interacting with others, improve their emotional intelligence, and actively participate in various extracurricular physical exercises to improve their physical fitness, cultivate their interests and hobbies, and become well-rounded individuals. In addition, they should improve their academic performance, realize the importance of learning in changing their destiny, and gradually learn to overcome feelings of loneliness, establish a sunny, optimistic and healthy lifestyle and a mindset of self-esteem, self-improvement and self-confidence, thereby improving their mental health and resilience. Individualized interventions and adaptations help children to adapt smoothly to society, integrate into new lives and have a future full of endless possibilities.
5.2. Family Care and Education Guidance

The social adaptation of rural children is closely linked to the care and support they receive from their families. Negative parenting styles and unhealthy family atmospheres can have adverse effects on children's physical and mental development. Therefore, parents must utilize the family's guardianship and educational functions to provide full guidance and support for their children during their social adaptation. Biases towards rural children's psychological problems should be avoided. Children's social adaptability can be improved by prompt identification of any adaptation difficulties and effective communication between parents and children to solve the problem together. It is important for parents to pay attention to their children's learning and living conditions, and not just their academic performance and basic needs. It is important for parents to pay attention to their children's learning and living conditions, and not just their academic performance and basic needs. Therefore, parents should focus on enhancing their children's mental health education. They should cultivate correct educational concepts and engage in fair communication with their children. This approach will not only help them monitor their children's academic performance but also pay attention to their healthy growth and overall development. At the same time, parents should avoid arbitrary and violent behavior and judgment, should understand and love children, and help them overcome difficulties in social adaptation and obtain good development with the care and help of parents.

5.3. School Level: Building a Good School Environment and Education System

Schools play a crucial role in shaping children's social integration and adherence to societal norms. To achieve this, it is important to create a positive campus atmosphere and organize extracurricular activities. Schools should regularly organize social, cultural, and sporting activities to enhance children's all-round qualities and help them better understand local culture and integrate into local life. Secondly, establish and improve the school's mental health work system and student records. Record any adjustment problems experienced by students and formulate appropriate solutions based on these records. This will provide timely psychological support to students with poor school adjustment. Thirdly, focus on improving the quality of teachers. Teachers are the people who understand students the best, second only to parents, and are also the most trusted by students. On one hand, teachers should provide care, respect, and support to students in their learning and life situations. Teachers should provide timely affirmation and encouragement to students, helping them build self-confidence. Additionally, teachers should suggest that students adopt positive social attitudes, actively communicate with classmates, and sincerely praise others in detail. It is important to avoid conflicts and fights. Teachers can serve as role models and help pupils adapt to school rules and regulations. They should also teach local pupils to assist children who may struggle in the school environment, such as those from difficult families, abandoned children, single-parent households, and pupils from remarried families. It is important for teachers to maintain objectivity and avoid subjective evaluations. The language used should be clear, objective, and value-neutral, avoiding biased, emotional, figurative, or ornamental language. The text should adhere to conventional academic structure and formatting, including clear titles and consistent citation. Precise subject-specific vocabulary should be used when necessary. The text should be grammatically correct and free from spelling and punctuation errors. No new content should be added beyond what is already present in the original text. Teachers should be aware of bullying in the classroom to prevent or intervene in time. Additionally, schools should provide psychological counselling and mental health care for rural children. It is common for schools to lack specialized psychological counselling teachers or courses, so institutions should be set up to help students adapt to their new environment. This can help children to feel a sense of belonging and love, and eliminate feelings of inferiority, loneliness, and personality defects. In terms of social interaction, it is important to avoid subjecting children to external pressure. Through the cooperation of parents and schools, psychological
counselling skills can be used to motivate children, give them more care and guidance, and make them feel supported. It is crucial to use clear and concise language, avoiding biased or emotional language, and employing a formal register. Additionally, precise subject-specific vocabulary should be used when it conveys the meaning more precisely than a similar non-technical term. The text should be grammatically correct and free from spelling and punctuation errors. Finally, the content of the improved text must be as close as possible to the source text, and the addition of further aspects must be avoided at all costs.

5.4. Community Level: Community Care and Resource Integration

The community, as the smallest unit of urban management, directly manages rural families and their children. In addition to the family and school, the community is closely connected to their daily lives and plays a significant role in maintaining the stability and harmony of children's families and education. Social workers should advocate for rural children with social adjustment difficulties by integrating social group resources and striving for better educational resources. This will help guarantee conditions in all aspects for rural children and provide good social policy support to improve their social adjustment ability. It is important to avoid subjective evaluations and biased language, and to use precise subject-specific vocabulary when necessary. The text should also adhere to conventional academic structure and formatting, with clear and concise sentences and a logical flow of information.

Secondly, community workers can use the media to create a positive public opinion atmosphere in the community. This can help to eliminate stereotypes and negative labels that are often associated with rural children. By promoting positive news and stories about rural children, they can encourage a more positive attitude towards integration into their new environment. This approach can help to gain broader social support for rural children. At the same time, the media can be utilized to report on the community atmosphere and provide necessary care and support. Additionally, community culture should be developed through education and humanistic care, including holding a series of lectures. Professional psychological counsellors can provide psychological support to students and their families who have psychological abnormalities. This can help to promote the social adjustment of individuals and groups. Additionally, the community can actively improve its entertainment, medical, and other infrastructure to provide a rich environmental system for children. Financial aid is also available for students from low-income families. Finally, since both communities and schools are vital components of the social ecosystem, it is inevitable that they cooperate with each other. Therefore, exploratory collaboration with local schools to address children's social adaptation issues is a growing trend.

5.5. Government Level: Political Guarantee and Public Communication

As a crucial pillar for facilitating individual social adaptation, the government can provide policy support and institutional guarantees. By removing barriers to unequal adjustment, rural families can be assisted. This can be accomplished through the elimination of restrictions on enrollment and education opportunities for rural children, ensuring equitable access to high-quality resources, appealing to social welfare groups to extend care and support towards rural children, as well as fostering public recognition of the invaluable contributions made by both rural children and their parents in urban development while acknowledging the challenges they encounter. Concurrently, governmental efforts should focus on enhancing teacher training within schools catering to migrant workers' children with an aim to enhance educational standards and bridge the gap between urban and rural schools. Such measures will contribute significantly towards fostering a sense of societal acceptance among rural children. The second aspect involves implementing appropriate media communication strategies which encompass producing diverse media materials tailored specifically for children while promoting exposure to content that aligns with their cognitive abilities, reflects real-life scenarios, and is age-appropriate.
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