Psychological Problems and Countermeasures of Boarding Students in Rural Primary Schools——Based on the Investigation of County L in Shaanxi Province

Hua WANG *, **Xiaotong LIU**

College of Humanities and Social Development, Northwest A & F University, Yangling 712100, China

Abstract With the implementation of the school relocation policy in the 1990s, the number of rural primary schools has dropped sharply. In order to better solve the problem of schooling for rural students, the development of boarding schools has become a realistic choice. However, for pupils lacking self-reliance, premature boarding can have an adverse effect on their mental development. In the investigation of county L in southern Shaanxi, the physical and mental development of boarding students is influenced by such factors such as the family's economic status, the supervision of primary boarding schools, and the isolation of social contacts under the boarding system. Therefore, trying to make recommendations to care for boarding students from the duties and responsibilities of the family, the school and the government is of positive significance in advancing education equity.

Key words Rural education, Boarding primary school, Boarder, Psychological problems

1 Introduction

Since the 1990s, with the accelerating pace of urbanization and the reduction of the age-appropriate population in rural compulsory education, the primary schools that are distributed in a dotted pattern have the disadvantages of fewer student sources, larger quantity and poorer quality. To optimize the allocation of rural educational resources and comprehensively improve the educational quality and investment efficiency of rural primary and secondary schools, the policy of merging schools began to be implemented nationwide. The adjustment of school layout has solved the problems that larger distance to schools and increasing dropout rate due to reduced number of rural schools. However, it has also led to overcapacity in township center schools. When the center school lacks facilities and teachers the development of quality education will be inevitably affected. The background and living environment of rural primary school boarders are unique, and their psychological environment is relatively fragile. In the process of growing up, they will also be under more pressure than their peers. If the boarding school cannot balance the boarding community, the unfairness of rural education will be intensified further. This article focused on the learning and living conditions of boarders in rural primary schools through investigation on county L in southern Shaanxi Province and tried to analyze the problems and influencing factors of the boarder's psychological environment, so as to promote families, school and society to give more care to this group of students.

2 Review of the literature

After adjustment of the school layout, the rural boarding school is generally the central primary school in the township. Due to the limited resources of rural education, the burden on boarding primary schools in the process of integration of old and new functions tends to outweigh their natural ability to regulate. As a result, issues such as learning, living and hygiene, education costs, personal and traffic safety appear in the management of boarding students. In recent years, research on boarding students' psychological problems has mainly started in three areas. The first is the adaptability analysis of boarders in rural primary schools. Since the rigidly merged schools face problems such as the lack of construction of school buildings and living facilities, boarding students cannot truly integrate into boarding life. In addition, the shortage of rural boarding primary school teachers is serious. It is not uncommon for a teacher to take on multiple courses. The heavy teaching tasks make it difficult for many teachers to devote their energies to students' ideological education and psychological counseling. In particular, there is a greater need for boarding groups in this area[1]. Many boarding primary schools still regard the academic performance and education quality as the standard for the quality of schooling. This practice stifled respect for students' potential and personality and could not meet the needs of humanistic education management. Therefore, under the heavy pressure of learning, boarding students are difficult to feel a sense of belonging to the school[2]. The second is the analysis of personality characteristics of boarders in rural primary schools. Inner emotions of boarders who leave their homes prematurely are prone to becoming vulnerable. When family vacancies are not filled, the mood and mentality of boarders will be affected[3], who even show

a lack of feelings about love, sexual awareness deviation and prematurity, lack of role acquisition and personality deviations. Related research found that depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, autism and other psychological symptoms occur more frequently in the boarding group than in day students. Boarding students are more awkward overall and appear to be more passive in making friends[4]. The third is the study of the socialization level of boarders in rural primary schools[5]. Wang Shutao and Mao Yaqing think that the incidence of disciplinary and anti-social behavior problems is higher than that of ordinary children[6]. Wu Fangwen observed the boarding community from the perspective of campus bullying. It was found that the frequency of encountering bullying in boarding students was higher than that in day students. Moreover, the phenomenon of social withdrawal caused by the bullying incident on campus also became more obvious[7]. Scholars, from the aspects of adaptability to school, personality traits and socialization level, have all expressed concerns about the boarders' mental health status. Most of the current research on boarding students focuses on analysis of the status of boarding life, learning situation and psychological symptoms from the perspective of educational investment and school management. There are few discussions about the underlying causes of their psychological problems. The social psychological mechanism caused by the boarding system is scarcely involved. Therefore, analyzing the living and learning environment of boarders and analyzing the impact of family, school and social interaction activities on their psychology is an effective way to solve the psychological dilemma of boarding students.

3 Basic situation of psychological environment of rural primary school boarders

3.1 Emotional communication obstacles with family members
Compared with day students, boarders are reluctant to communicate with their families about what is happening around them. The emotional relationship between them and their families is also relatively alienated. The topics between them are limited the daily diet and daily life, instead of emotional and psychological resolution and communication. When boarders have some small secrets, they are more inclined to hide. In contrast, day students share their ideas with their loved ones and partners at any time. It was learned from the exchange that the frequency of boarding students' telephone contact with parents is low, averaging about three times a month; and the talk time is also very short, and most of the family members ask about their children's diet and physical condition. The boarding students generally reflect that as separation takes longer, parents are gradually becoming unfamiliar. Most of the boarders in the survey were left-behind children who were taken care of by old generation or other relatives during the school holidays. These guardians can only meet the children's needs. They usually do not pay attention to the children's psychological dynamic changes, and are also not good at perceiving their inner thoughts from their subtle expressions and behaviors. The supply at the basic level of demand makes it difficult for children to rely on family relationships. The children's psychological needs have long been unsatisfied from the parents and they gradually alienate the emotional relationship with the families.

3.2 Poor academic performance and great psychological pressure
The comparison of academic performance shows that the overall score of day students is higher than that of boarders. In terms of learning resources alone, day students have a great advantage. Many day students will have parental guidance or hire a teacher for family counseling. Boarders have fewer ways to get help when they encounter learning problems. When talking about academic achievement, the tone of the boarder is not as firm as that of a day student. It seems somewhat lacking in confidence. Teachers tend to pay more attention to the top students. Therefore, the differential treatment caused by different academic performance has brought psychological burden to many boarders. Some boarders have even violated school rules to reflect their own existence, such as clique, fight, cheating in exams, plagiarism and non-compliance with classroom disciplines. Many teachers report that there are more bad habits on the boarders, and some unruly students are not willing to teach. Even some teachers arrange seats according to academic performance to prevent bad students from affecting good students. Therefore, the back row has become a VIP area for bad students and has become a blind spot for teacher management. Many teachers treat their boarding students as they are, and the evaluation criterion for them is getting out from problem. Even if they have psychological problems, it is difficult to get help from the teacher. Therefore, boarders are more likely to be plagued by academic pressure and they show more concern and worry about performance rankings. Due to the lack of companionship and encouragement of the family behind, boarders feel alienated by their teachers and classmates, showing a tendency of low self-esteem and autism. The negative emotions they generate due to the loss of the examination will require longer time for resolution.

3.3 Vigilance and sensitiveness in making friends
The survey found that the school buildings in the boarding schools are generally inadequately equipped. Generally speaking, a dorm of less than 12 m² will accommodate more than 10 students, and the dormitory will be congested and difficult to meet the needs of living. The boarding students fell constrained and lack of security during their stay in the school. Classmates often clash because of some minor quarrels. They make friends not only out of an emotional need. It is also a way to seek self-protection. Due to lack of awareness of self-action and self-control, in the event of a conflict, boarders often act to harm others. Even through crowding out, isolation and insulting speech and physical attacks, they achieve the goal. As a result, boarding students show more vigilance in classmates' interaction. They are more careful about their observations, require longer time to be familiar with each other, and are more worried about the breakdown of friends. Compared to day students, they will not easily share their feelings. Once the other party has gained their trust, they will pour more emotion into

this friendship. Boarders are more delicate and sensitive to emotional experiences. In their hearts, friends take on more emotionally dependent functions. Once the relationship between friends is not maintained, it will have a more serious impact on their daily lives. As a result, psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, loss of self-confidence, *etc.* are easily generated.

3. 4 Deviation in self-perception In the interviews with boarders of rural primary schools in county L, it was found that boarders are less active and self-confident than day students. They often feel that they are worse than others, or think that others are more important in the collective. Few can make the right positioning for themselves. Different from day students, boarders are very concerned about what other people think of themselves and don't talk to others easily. They always underestimate their ability to do things and be more cautious in the competition. They also overestimate their mental capacity and tend to hide secrets and ideas. Boarding students often lack the objects they can rely on, and they rarely receive attention and recognition from others. Therefore, the psychological environment is vulnerable after experiencing setbacks. For the need of self-protection, some students will take a more extreme approach to fill their imbalances, such as gaining some kind of distorted satisfaction in the way of bullying classmates. Others will be passively patient, and they become more and more self-conscious and embarrassing. If not corrected in time, these improper ways of knowing and handling affairs will eventually form a set of behavioral systems, producing an adverse effect on future life. In recent years, the boarding primary school has become the main body of compulsory education in rural areas, forming the pattern of one school one township. In the face of a growing boarding community, analyzing the social psychological mechanism of boarders' psychological dilemmas, helping them to prevent mental illnesses in the environment away from their families and master the ability to handle the problems of learning and living alone has become a social issue that cannot be ignored.

4 Causes of psychological problems of rural primary school boarders

4. 1 Negative mentality caused by family economic conditions When visiting the village, it was found that the boarder's family's economic conditions are generally not as good as those of day students. Some families have foreign debt and have very limited life. Related research shows that poverty will expose individuals to more stressful life. In the early years of individual personality formation, once the environmental pressure exceeds the ability to self-regulate, the psychological defense is extremely easy to be defeated, causing the individual to have negative emotions such as fear, doubt, and depression and so on and making the psychological environment vulnerable[8]. For boarding pupils of poor families, the intensity of life stress and the frequency of troubled events are higher than those of day students. The physical and mental development of students growing in this unfavorable family environment is generally prone to problems. Moreover, they live in

poverty for a long time, and their social feelings and enthusiasm for learning will also be at a low level[9]. Poverty will take away the sense of well-being and security of minors, thus increasing their inferiority complex. Especially for primary school boarders who live independently from their parents, once they feel uneasy and disgusted about their economic conditions, it would be easier for a person's contemptuous speech and act to sting their self-esteem. When they fell depressed and unreliable and are not effectively relieved, they often express themselves in a certain way. The catharsis is more often expressed in a negative manner.

4. 2 Rural boarding primary schools are lack of attention to students For boarders, the school is equivalent to the second family. However, the survey found that the construction of facilities and related management methods in many boarding schools is not suitable for student development, which directly affects the life quality of boarders at school.

4. 2. 1 Little communication between school and boarders' parents and lack of specialized psychological education. Regular and frequent communication between teachers and parents is an effective way to understand the mental health of boarders and help them adapt to boarding life and overcome psychological barriers. However, there is often a lack of necessary communication between boarding primary schools and parents. On the one hand, the family members of the boarding students are mostly migrant workers. They are usually busy and have no time to contact the teachers. On the other hand, the quantity of teachers in a certain township is limited, and it is difficult for teachers to take care of the boarding students, and they often ignore the psychological education of boarders. The boarding primary schools in the county L lack the equipment of psychological teachers. As a result, the classrooms on ideological, moral, and psychological education are difficult to carry out. Therefore, it is impossible to improve students' ability to prevent and respond to mental illness in a real sense. With the increasing number of students enrolled in the central school, the work pressure and intensity of the teachers are always at a high level. Therefore, as far as the management of boarding students is concerned, the vast majority of schools are only able to guarantee their normal classes. Even if boarders have psychological problems, the schools usually have no time to worry about them. Communicating with boarders to alleviate their psychological problems is often overlooked.

4. 2. 2 Poor school environment and tedious campus life. Due to the high demand for boarding in multiple boarding schools in county L, schools can only choose to accept students in third grade or above. They also give priority to accepting students who have a long travelling distance, inconvenience in commuting and economic difficulties. However, even so, the school premises are still in short supply and the dormitory space is crowded. Insufficient investment in supporting facilities such as tap water supply, heating equipment, fire protection equipment and emergency lights have all brought inconvenience to boarding. In the safety supervision of the dormitory, the cultural quality of the school's logistics manage-

ment staff is low, and their understanding of campus management is limited to doing a good job in environmental sanitation, leading to occurrence of some security incidents from time to time. In order to ensure student safety, boarding schools generally adopt closed-door management and extend self-study time. As the scope of activities is limited to campus interiors, boarders lack many opportunities for recreation and relaxation. In addition, rural primary schools lack cultural, art, sports, and other cultural courses. The lives of boarders are increasingly dull and monotonous, and psychological stress cannot be transferred and resolved. To make up for this lack, some schools have also added some cultural and sports activities, aiming to ease the learning atmosphere and at the same time help improve students' comprehensive quality. But boarders often refuse to participate in such activities because they psychologically avoid social interactions. The participants of these activities are still concentrated in the day students and the boarding students are actively or passively excluded. Not only the family poverty and the lack of supervision methods in boarding schools will have a negative impact on students' psychology, and rural boarding schools themselves reflect the unequal distribution of educational resources under the dual urban-rural system[10], which further promotes the separation of students' social relations with parents, teachers and classmates.

4.3 Boarding system leads to segregation of students' social communication relationship

4.3.1 Parental separation causes psychological harm. Parent-child communication has a clear role in shaping the psychological security of minors. Enhanced communication between parents and children can reduce separation anxiety for boarders and promote better school adaptation. However, under the boarding system, children communicate less with parents and family members, and even some parents use the phrases "too busy", "more care leading to more dependence" and "less disturbance on children's learning" as their resignation, leading to less communication between parents and children. Parental-level dependency does not usually reflect too much in peacetime. However, once faced with an external threat, it will be activated to protect, soothe, and regulate the mental state. After the crisis, it will gradually return to clam with the degree of psychological demand. The boarding system has led to the alienation of the parent-child relationship. Parents fail to give children more care and protection during their childhood. The lack of family affection during the boarding period has caused many students to express their disappointment with family affection.

4.3.2 There is estrangement with students and teachers. Pupils are in a period of self-cognition and they value the relationship with their classmates and teachers. The survey found that similar to symbols such as gender and study grade, boarding has also become a symbol of group division, which affects students' range of friends and has come an obstacle to communication between day students and boarders. Normally, individuals tend to choose peers that have been in contact for a longer period of time and have con-

sistent life rhythm, family background and values. In this friend-making mode, there is a clearer dividing line between the circles of friends of boarders and day students. There is little overlap between the two. Due to the limitation of the level of mental development, friend relationship in primary school is relatively fragile and relatively easy to change. When classmates have a rift in their friendship, they lack the ability to take appropriate strategies to solve problems. Therefore, in the absence of family counseling and education, boarders appear isolated and helpless in making friends. Their psychological state can also be difficult to improve due to the limitations of friends. Under the exam-oriented education system, teachers pay more attention to indicators such as the rate of achievement, and the rate of admission to school. The level of academic performance is positively related to the distance between teachers and students. Therefore, for boarding students with relatively low overall performance, teachers also have a sense of distance in their hearts. Many boarding students reflected that they are lack of care, recognition and encouragement from teachers, so they become tired of learning and anxiety. As ignored by teachers for a long time, some poor boarders are easy to develop acquired helplessness personality after frustration and become self-defeating. They consider boarding students to be marginalized objects, so they are subjectively alienated from their studies and are more alienated from teachers. How to help boarders gain security, love and affection in school, build self-confidence and interest about learning, and develop good psychological qualities such as self-discipline and cooperation requires building a psychological support mechanism for boarders in rural primary schools starting from the three responsible subjects: family, school and government.

5 Countermeasures to solve psychological problems of boarders in rural primary schools

5.1 Parents should improve education methods and establish links with schools and children The family is the emotional support of the individual, especially for primary school students. Family support, care and education play a crucial guiding role in the growth of individuals. Parents need to think more about children's issues in their interactions with their children and pay attention at the same time to the manner of words and preaching. As parents, they should communicate with their children about the boarding at school, explain the reasons, educate and guide children how to get along with their classmates, and cultivate children's psychology of tolerance, self-protection and mutual help and love. Parents should support and encourage children spiritually, and do a good job in the transition between family life and school life, in order to better help children to better embark on an independent life. In addition, parents should be more active in their communication. Do not think that if children do not confess to parents, there will be no problems. Instead, they should understand more information about their children from the class teachers to correct timely the children's psychological misunderstanding. By caring about the children's physical health, campus

life, and interactions with classmates and teachers, *etc*, the important position of boarding children in their families will be felt by them. Thus, the emotional connection between parents and children will be deepened, helping children form a positive and optimistic attitude while giving them a sense of security.

5.2 Schools should improve their auxiliary functions and do a good job in educating and managing boarders

5.2.1 Creating a good learning and living environment from the perspective of boarding students. The management of the school is a guarantee for the smooth progress of all the work, and it is also a prerequisite for the boarding students to have a sense of belonging to the school. Boarding schools must not only ensure the completeness of basic facilities such as classrooms, dormitories, canteens and bathhouses and create a good education and living environment for students, and they must also pay attention to some psychological needs of the boarding group and afford certain family functions. In recreational life, schools should organize some activities for boarding students within their own groups so that boarders can fully participate, enjoy the fun and ease the stress. In addition, some books on mental health can also be placed at designated locations in the dormitory so that boarders can borrow freely, thus helping them form mental health awareness and prevent mental illness. The schools must work hard to create a relaxed and warm atmosphere for the boarders. Through more supervision, care and love, the boarders are relieved of the pressure on their lives, helping them develop independent living ability and social communication skills, and shape a healthy personality.

5.2.2 Paying attention to psychological counseling and strengthen psychological education for boarding students. Boarding schools can adopt a teacher-student team approach and assign boarders to designated teachers for psychological assistance. On the one hand, teachers must give students guidance on learning, help them establish their learning confidence and ease the academic pressure on boarders. On the other hand, teachers should be able to be good at discovering the life difficulties and psychological problems the boarders face. On the basis of understanding the psychological needs of boarding students, teachers must grasp their psychological characteristics to educate them, in order to help them break through the psychological barriers. In addition, boarding schools urgently need to strengthen the selection and cultivation of life-oriented psychological counseling teachers. In terms of teacher communication, more care should be paid to the psychological teacher group. For the requirements and proposals of the psychological teachers, schools should pay attention to the collection and report to the education department in time. Psychological teachers need to create psychological records for problem students in boarding students and master their psychological dynamics through regular interviews.

5.3 The government should give more attention and play the role of backing well

5.3.1 Financial support. On the one hand, the government should shoulder its responsibilities and pay attention to the construction plan of rural boarding primary schools and give corresponding financial support. On the basis of full investigation and understanding, a dynamic fund management model should be established in the form of setting up special funds according to the actual needs of various regions at various time periods to increase the efficiency of the use of funds. The internal facilities in the boarding schools should be improved to create opportunities for rural children to enjoy high-quality education. On the other hand, it is necessary to attach importance to help poor boarders to help them ease the pressure of life and feelings of inferiority. Through the information matching work with schools, the actual economic burden of boarding students is objectively and accurately measured, and the management and use of boarding students' subsidy are monitored and verified in time. As far as possible, different subsidy standards are determined according to the poverty level of different students. While taking responsible for living subsidy for boarders, the state also needs to establish a sound management system to implement supporting funds, changing the phenomenon of weakening of project functions caused by the grading bearing and increasing the efficiency of the funds[11].

5.3.2 Improving management practices. In the construction of the protection system for boarders, more attention should be paid to the improvement of details, and the operability should be improved. Management practices need to include all aspects of the boarders' life. For example, the standard for boarding schools' living facilities, safety, fire prevention measures and drills and boarders' meals should also be stipulated. A detailed system should be also developed for boarding students' enrollment and support, physical and mental health, contact with parents and guardians and preservation of personal belongings. In addition to the standard requirements for school management, exhaustive code of conduct should be made for other members that boarders may come into contact with. With the continuous merging of rural education sites, the status of boarding schools in rural education has also been continuously highlighted. Therefore, it is necessary for the grassroots government to pay high attention[12]. On the one hand, through the frontline visit, the development and construction of boarding schools are understood more deeply and more comprehensively to gather experience. On the other hand, based on the results of the investigation and analysis, the supervision and enforcement are strengthened by referring to the management methods introduced by foreign countries while filling in the lack of education in rural primary education.

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the following recommendations are put forward:

(ⅰ) Paying attention to the rural children's family rearing environment, and improving the quality of family rearing environment. The children aged 0 − 3 are mainly cared for by their parents, and the main place to live is the home. Moreover, there are some problems in the rural family's raising environment, such as the low degree of caregivers' participation, ignoring the education of the children. It is necessary to make the rural caretakers realize their importance to the early development of the children through publicity and guidance, and increase their participation in the development of the children: to accompany the children to play more games, tell stories to the children, read and draw books and so on. (ⅱ) Improving early childhood development services in rural areas. At present, there are no special institutions and departments responsible for the provision of early childhood development services in rural areas. However, the situation of early childhood development in rural areas and the growing gap between urban and rural education urgently require the provision of early childhood development services in rural areas. It is necessary to mobilize social forces for the active participation and gradually integrate rural early childhood development services into the provision of rural basic public services. Where conditions permit, early childhood development services should be provided either through the establishment of early childhood development activity centers or through home entry guidance to offset the negative impact of low quality family rearing environments on early childhood development. (ⅲ) Increasing investment in early childhood development studies. Scientific measures can promote early childhood development with half the effort, so it is necessary to increase investment and construct a scientific and effective model of providing early childhood development services.

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