

## *Original Paper*

# Discussion on the Path of Group Work to Enhance Parent-child Relationship of Children from the Perspective of Increasing Enhancement—Take the X Community in Chengdu City as an Example

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### **Abstract**

*The migration of households within China's population is a clear trend, and the proportion of migrant children is increasing annually. The government has gradually paid more attention to the migrant population and the children living with them, and has introduced preferential policies to alleviate the pressure they face. However, migrant children experience frequent mobility within their family structure, which can negatively impact their personal development, psychological health, and socialization. Comprehensive factors leading to poor family interactions in mobile families. A strong parent-child relationship is crucial for successful socialization of children and adolescents, and plays a pivotal role in the process of children's physical and mental development. Therefore, how to solve the parent-child problems encountered by these families after their mobility is the problem that social work should pay attention to. From the perspective of empowerment, this study utilizes the group work method to intervene in the parent-child relationship of migrant children, aiming at providing some experience for the research and practice of exploring the path of improving the parent-child relationship of migrant children.*

### **Keywords**

*Migrant children, Parent-child interaction, Group work*

## 1. Research Background

Since the 1990s, China has undergone significant changes in its political, economic and social structure. Large numbers of people from rural areas have migrated to economically developed regions, resulting in a migrant population that gradually becomes urban population and cannot be overlooked. According to the National Health Commission's Report on *the Development of Children of China's Floating Population (2021)*, in 2020, over 40% of Chinese children were from the floating population, with a total of approximately 130 million children. This indicates that the floating population in China is currently undergoing an adjustment period, with an increasing trend in household mobility and a rising proportion of children in the floating population. Chengdu, as a new first-tier city, is experiencing an improvement in population attraction and concentration. According to *the Bulletin of the Seventh National Population Census of Chengdu*, the floating population of Chengdu is 8.459 million, which represents a 102.41% increase compared to the sixth census. It is crucial to focus on the migrant population and their children for the coordinated development of Chengdu's economy and society.

Most migrant children are aged between 6 and 15. They face significant challenges in terms of personality development and socialization. The absence of sufficient attention and guidance can result in mental health and social identity issues. Family migration has led to maladaptation in the individual development of migrant children, coupled with the accumulation of pressure in family life, parents' lack of scientific education concepts and other practical reasons, parents are even more neglectful of their children's care, and families may face problems such as a single way of parent-child interaction, poor content of the interaction, and inappropriate ways of family education. The mobility of families within the floating population presents a new challenge to urban living spaces. How to solve the practical problems encountered by these families after the mobility is a problem that social work should pay attention to. Under the background, it is of great practical significance to explore methods of social work intervention that enhances the parent-child relationship of migrant children.

## 2. Literature Review

Using "migrant children, children who migrate with their parents, children of migrant workers" as search terms, this study reviewed the relevant literature over the past five years and found that there are few articles on the parent-child relationship of migrant children and that there is a need to pay attention to the parent-child relationship of migrant children. Therefore, the author systematically summarises the existing studies from the following three aspects.

### 2.1 Research on Migrant Children

Domestic research has focused on the disciplines of education, political science and psychology, with an emphasis on the education, mental health and social integration of migrant children. Compulsory education for migrant children in China encounters significant obstacles regarding the inequality in the starting point, the education process, and the outcome of education. These obstacles need address ensure equal opportunities for all children (Pan, 2017; Li, 2018). The implementation of compulsory

education policies often deviates from its intended purpose, affecting its effectiveness (Cao, 2016; Liu, 2019), Integrated education should be promoted through the construction of a synergistic mechanism involving the government, schools, families, and society to support the integration and development of migrant children (Zhang, 2018; Liu, 2019). Regarding mental health, scholars have concluded that migrant children's mental health problems can be attributed to four factors: society, family, school and the surrounding environment, and the students themselves. Additionally, peer support, migrant children's own resilience, and parental involvement (Liu, 2020) have been found to be statistically significant in promoting their mental health. Furthermore, migrant children face challenges when it comes to integrating into the mainstream society, including urban mentality, sense of belonging, educational pathways (Guo, 2014), the main factors that affect their social integration are cultural differences, social support and individuality (Wu, 2020).

Foreign countries mainly focus on public health, demography, pedagogy, and psychology. Research has demonstrated that migrant children and their families experience a lack of access to healthcare (Murphy, 2020), encounter challenges in education (Kinder, 1995), face difficulties in establishing social networks (Sime, 2015), experience high levels of stress during the migration process, and are at risk of developing psychological disorders due to vulnerability factors. Additionally, migrant children are sometimes viewed as a potential threat to social cohesion, which is necessary for economic growth and development (Devine, 2013). It is evident that migrant children are often marginalized by society and require urgent care and support from both the nation and society.

### *2.2 Research on the Parent-child Relationship of Migrant Children*

Existing studies have fully analysed the current situation and causes of parent-child relationships, and parent-child relationship problems of migrant children can be categorised as problems of family education and parent-child communication problems. The state of family education is currently reflected in the insufficient amount of it, the lack of spiritual life within families, and the fact that traditional models still dominate family behavior (Xue, 2014). The lack of family education can be attributed to several factors, including a poor learning environment, outdated family education concepts, ineffective home-school cooperation, and lowly parental concern for children (He & Dang, 2017; Zhang, 2016). Regarding parent-child communication, parents often unconsciously adopt a condescending and commanding attitude when educating their children (Lin, 2021). Analyzing this from the perspective of ecosystem theory, parent-child relationships suffer from an overemphasis on academic content, a lack of a harmonious family atmosphere, and a lack of emotional interaction (Qi & Tao, 2022).

Parent-child relationships can significantly impact children's cognitive constructs regarding themselves, others and the world (DeKlyen, 2016), Kim et al. discovered that some East Indian immigrant children frequently experienced feelings of failure due to their inability to meet their parents' expectations (Kim, Coletti, Williams, & Hepler, 1995), resulting in self-denial. Additionally, the parent-child relationship can significantly affect the mental health, social integration, and personality development of migrant

children. The parent-child relationship plays an intermediary role in the generation gap and loneliness experienced by migrant children (Yuan & Fang, 2018). There is a significant positive correlation between the social integration of migrant children and their parent-child interactions within the family (Qiao, 2015). Moreover, full parental involvement is an important form of social capital that enhances the cognitive abilities of migrant children (Liang, Ye, & Li, 2018). Research and data suggest that different aspects of the parent-child relationship should be carefully considered.

### *2.3 Research on Social Work Intervention in the Parent-child Relationship of Migrant Children*

In terms of intervention methods, both domestically and internationally, casework and group work are the two approaches employed. Regarding intervention theories, there are several family therapy, cognitive-behavioural, and rational emotive therapy approaches that are primarily used, with limited in theoretical perspectives. The Satiya home treatment model remains the main approach in case work. Some scholars suggest that the adoption of the Satiya model in parent-child relationship services can help workers understand the inner needs of the service recipients and stimulate their potential more effectively (Wendy, Jim, & Judy, 2002). The study employed interviews and participant observation as the primary research methods for case-based interventions. Group-based interventions, on the other hand, utilized questionnaires, resulting in a fragmented approach inadequate combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Overall, the theoretical and practical research on the parent-child relationship of migrant children in social work is relatively weak.

### *2.4 This Section Concludes with a Literature Review*

In general, literature on domestic and foreign migrant children is relatively rich, but there are still some shortcomings. Firstly, there is insufficient analysis and research on the sociology of migrant children, with only a few studies focusing on the parent-child relationship. Secondly, the relevant research focuses on the perspective of problems, highlighting the current situation and problems at the macro level, but lacks micro-specific practical intervention. Most existing research focuses on either migrant children or parents, with a lack of research that considers both groups together. Additionally, social workers primarily use family therapy theories for interventions, which may not be sufficient.

## **3. Analysis of the Current Situation and Causes of Parent-child Relationships among Migrant Children in the X Community**

To gain a better understanding of the current situation and issues surrounding parent-child relationships of migrant children in the X community, the researcher utilized a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Interviews were conducted with the community staff prior to practical activities, and a questionnaire survey was administered to migrant children and their parents in the X community through door-to-door visits, with the assistance of community staff and reliance on community programs. The resulting data will inform the design of a more targeted group's program.

The preliminary study targeted the directors of community women's and children's centers and the staff of community social organizations for interviews. A total of 240 questionnaires were distributed, 80 to

migrant children and 160 to their parents. 226 valid questionnaires were returned after excluding 8 invalid questionnaires from children and 6 from parents.

### *3.1 Basic Information of the Migrant Children in the X Community*

X community in Chengdu has the population of registered resident about 2,600 and a floating population of over 30,000. It is a typical community of floating population. According to the information provided by the community, there are around 2,500 floating families and about 1,000 children, aged between 8 and 12 years old. However, the projection of existing social service in the community rarely takes into account this group.

### *3.2 The Current Situation of the Parent-child Relationship of the Migrant Children in the X Community*

#### *3.2.1 Parent-child Relationship is Alienated*

Based on the survey, 94.45% of children and 75.97% of parents reported a negative parent-child relationship. Additionally, over 50% of respondents reported issues with insufficient communication, lack of interaction, and limited emotional connection. Families play a crucial role in the socialization of children, providing them with living spaces, security, and exposure to social norms. According to the author's survey, nearly 70% of migrant families spend only 30 minutes in face-to-face interaction, and 75% of families have only one parent-child interaction per day. Of these interactions, 34.42% are focused on learning, while 15.58% of parents report having difficulty in communicating with their children. These findings indicate that parent-child interaction may not be optimal.

#### *3.2.2 The Parent-child Relationship is Unequal*

The subject of parent-child relationship is both parent-child parties. When one of them assumes a dominant position, personal problems between family members and children can arise. Surprisingly, when faced with parent-child disagreements, only 9.72% of respondents indicated a willingness to discuss the matter together, while 36.11% chose to avoid communication in order to prevent conflicts. The data comparison clearly indicates that in the X community, the interaction between parents and migrant children is dominated by parents, with little regard for the children's ideas and suggestions in decision-making. This result in children being under the authority of their parents and lacking the willingness to communicate actively, which exacerbates the unequal relationship.

#### *3.2.3 The Intended Action does not Align with the Actual Action*

Parents often desire a positive relationship with their children, but their understanding of this relationship may be limited to perception rather than action. When asked about their ideal parent-child relationship, the most common response among both parents and children was to be 'good friends', with children accounting for 58.33% and parents accounting for 59.74%. Additionally, the percentage of individuals identified as 'teachers and friends' is relatively high, with children accounting for 26.39% and parents accounting for 22.08%. This indicates that parents value a positive relationship with their children. However, regardless of the perspective on time, frequency, and content of family interactions, or the degree of equality in the parent-child relationship, the actions of the parents contradict their subjective intentions, and their efforts to improve the relationship are not evident.

### *3.3 Analysis of the Current Situation of the Parent-child Relationship of the Migrant Children in the X Community*

#### *3.3.1 Parents do not Pay Enough Attention to Parent-child Interaction*

Parents focus their families on making ends meet, making it difficult for them to maintain parent-child relationships. Some parents may lack a sufficient understanding of parent-child interaction, and they may focus too heavily on academic performance, neglecting important issues such as their children's mental health and personality development. 36% of parents have little interaction with their children during their free time. They lack a good understanding of the crucial role that the family environment plays in children's development. Additionally, they are unaware of how their own perceptions and behaviours can impact their children.

#### *3.3.2 Parent-child Interaction Knowledge and Skills are Limited*

The education level of the parents of the migrant children is generally low, 69.83% have not completed high school, while only 8.44% have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. Parents often lack an understanding of the knowledge and skills required for effective parent-child interaction, and even interact with their children inappropriately. In the event of disagreement with their children, 48.70% of parents insist on their own opinions, 30.51% ignored them, and only 8.44% of parents asked their children. It is evident that parents inherit the parent-child interaction processing mode of the previous generation through intergenerational imitation. However, they may lack interactive cognition and skills such as respect, equality, encouragement, and empathy.

#### *3.3.3 External Pressure Resulting from the Flow Environment*

Limited economic conditions can lead to increased pressure and family crises, 47.40% of parents believe that family social and economic conditions affect their interactions with their children. To alleviate economic pressure and avoid family risks, some parents work long hours or frequently change jobs, which can result in neglecting parent-child interaction. Children's living arrangements and social networks are constantly changing due to their parents' work. Unfortunately, these changes can often lead to unfair treatment and discrimination due to cultural, cognitive, and resource differences. This can cause children to withdraw and distance themselves from their parents, while the parents' lack of understanding can further damage the parent-child relationship.

#### *3.3.4 The Social Support Network is Relatively Weak*

Social support can provide an external support system for families, allowing the support network to operate normally and provide diversified support over time. This can form a long-term mechanism to help families overcome difficulties. The response of the community towards the floating population and their children is primarily based on policies and material care. Meanwhile, existing social service organizations are inadequate in providing services for family education and parent-child relationship improvement for the migrant population and their children. Due to mobility, most of these migrant families can only rely on their own families for resources and are unable to effectively obtain support from the community and society.

#### **4. Action Plan and the Implementation Process of the Parent-child Interaction Group**

##### *4.1 Group Scheme Design*

The team has chosen “home have you and me, warm harbor” as the theme, with "Empowerment" as the main focus, considering the circumstances of migrant children's families in the X Community and the community's situation, design and implementation of group intervention programmes, through the group intervention, the deficiencies and inadequacies of parent-child interactions of migrant families in the X Community were deconstructed, and the perceptions and behaviours of migrant children and their parents were reconstructed, so that they could discover their own strong power to promote the construction of parent-child relationships in their families. Parent-child interaction groups are set up in a total of seven sections, in accordance with the "interaction frequency - interaction content - interaction mode - interaction skills" intervention ideas correspond to the four phases of the group before the group, the group in the middle of the group, the maturity of the group and the end of the group, and strive to cultivate the interactive ability of both parents and children, and to improve the parent-child relationship.

##### *4.2 Group Execution Process*

Section 1: Parent-child children first met. T The group's primary objective in this section is to foster mutual familiarity among its members, comprehend the content and purpose of the group's activities, and establish the group's hierarchy. The social worker utilised the interactive game 'Law of Evolution' to capture the physical and sensory attention of the group members. This resulted in a significant increase in the frequency of discussion and communication among the group members. Additionally, the interactive game 'Exchanging Names' helped to reduce the sense of unfamiliarity among the group members and deepen their understanding of each other. During the session on establishing the group contract, group members expressed their views and opinions clearly, and actively discussed and defined the content of the group contract as "seriousness, equality, solidarity, cooperation, respect and confidentiality". The members of the group established initial knowledge and understanding, and made a positive change from silence to active conversation, and through mutual discussion and exchange eventually formed a common norm for the group to abide by.

Section 2: "Do you know me? The group's main objective in this section is to encourage team members to support one another, increase interaction between parents and children, and establish a connection between interactive games and the real world. Subsequently, the social worker played videos of family atmosphere with different frequency of interaction to connect the group members with their own family situations, and guided them with the game of "tell a person's character by looking at their hands" to stimulate the members' empathy with the contents of the videos by means of encouragement and questioning, so as to assist the group members in recognising the obstacles of the current stage of parent-child interactions, and to gradually make the group members aware of the need to take actions to solve their own problems.

Section 3: We are not perfect. The aim of this section is to present the defects and deficiencies of the parent-child interaction mode objectively, and encourage group members to reflect on them. By testing groups of families for the complete degree of 'exaggerated praise', we can understand the level of parent-child interaction and its content. And with the help of emoji megaphone and the game of making tag trees, team members can learn to understand the language factors involved in parent-child interaction. This section has transited from the social worker providing guidance and insight to the group, to requesting that the group present themselves. By creating the labelling tree, the group was able to collaboratively discuss and **record** areas for improvement in their respective family interactions. Social workers also use PPT and real life experience to explain the interaction mode, conveying one of the interaction skills -- encouragement and support. Under the guidance, group members realised their equal status and equal rights in the group. The frequency of parental authority decreased, and some children and parents were able to take the initiative to share their families scenes and anecdotes, initiating reflection.

Section 4: We have something to say. The aim of this section is to promote empathy among group members and to teach parent-child interaction skills by establishing a connection between parent-child communication and expression. Social workers introduced the game of the exchange of family role, requiring team members to change roles and restore the family scene. It is evident that when parents assume the role of their children in dealing with doubts and criticism, they may feel helpless and uncertain. Later, the social worker introduced the skills of family interaction -- to put oneself in sb else's shoes, commented on the problems presented in the scene and then invited the family members to reshape the label tree. *Huang's mother said: "to see the children one by one to tear off the label, I feel that their usual casual utterance of a word can be a kind of harm to the children."* The team members possess a profound comprehension of the flaws and shortcomings in parent-child interaction. The live presentation and their own performance have a greater impact on altering the team members' thoughts.

Section 5: Golden key to parent-child communication. The aim of this section is to teach parents positive parent-child interaction skills and styles that benefit both parents and children. This activity shared the knowledge and skills possessed by social workers with the group members in an intuitive manner, the parents and children are divided into two groups, the social worker explained the interaction mode of parent-child relationship and the correct communication's skills to the parent group, while the child group understood the parent-child interaction through the game, the group members were clearly aware of the misconceptions of the interaction mode, and actively explored the correct way of parent-child interaction in the group, and the cohesive force of the group increased in the face of the common families' problems. *Li's mother said, "I am usually busy and do not care about my children. The communication with my children is also about learning. After listening to the teacher's sharing, I found that I still need to change my thinking, and my family also needs to manage."* The members' willingness to change fostered cohesion and centripetal force, while the interest of some members encouraged others to participate.



Section 6: creates a perfect family. The objective of this section is to use human sculpture to demonstrate incorrect and correct gestures in family interactions in an intuitive manner, and to reshape an ideal family posture. Social workers utilised a technique known as the 'word guessing game' to expand upon emotional expressions in family scenes. Through the use of PPT presentations and the demonstrations of volunteer, they highlighted various family postures such as blaming, interrupting, irrationality, pleasing behaviour, and consistency. Group members then displayed and reshaped family sculptures based on specific families' scenes. As the culmination of the group, parents performed very positively, with some saying that they would "listen more to their children to express their feelings" and "change their own ideas of power", while others said that they would "encourage their children more often", which fully reflected that parents attached much greater importance to parent-child interactions. The social worker, with the aid of empowerment theory, assists parents and children in acknowledging their own capabilities and enhancing communication and interaction. This enables group members to overcome feelings of powerlessness and improve the parent-child relationship. The group members' familiarity and trust exceeded the social worker's expectations. However, some members were overly enthusiastic, leading to difficulties in controlling the situation.

Section 7: Parent-child light pool. The primary aim of this group session is for parents and children to provide feedback to each other regarding any changes or new discoveries made within the group. This will result in improved communication and expectations, consolidation of existing changes and achievements, and the management of parting emotions. As the final stage of the group, the social worker presented the edited video of the group's progress to the members, prompting them to remember the contents of the group's activities and summarise them. Through the focusing interview, the process of group was reviewed, and the existing changes were strengthened by reviewing the past experience. Each team member attentively listened to and realized each other's changes, fully expressing their own feelings and experiences, parents and children alike came to realize the importance of positive parent-child interaction. The team members shared notes with each other to communicate their expectations for their families. The final section concluded with an interactive game called "storm". The social worker emphasized that the support network of the group can continue later in life, and that the motivation, support, and change fostered by the group can persist outside of it.

#### *4.3 Group Work Assessment*

The group's activities are evaluated through a combination of process and impact assessments. As far as the process evaluation is concerned, the group members indicated that their concentration went through a process from a low to a high level, and some of them were able to change into the identity of a guide to motivate other group members to integrate into the group and feel the significance and role of the group, and after a variety of interactive sessions, the group members helped each other to share their experiences of parenting interactions and learning skills, and their exchanges with each other broadened the circle of interpersonal communication, and this kind of group support can also continue outside the group. Regarding the evaluation of effectiveness, the group's objectives were basically

achieved and most members were able to express their feelings. The follow-up survey indicated an improvement in the frequency and status of parent-child interaction. Secondly, group members were highly satisfied with the group, with most of them saying that the activities presented cognitive and interactive misconceptions that are difficult to focus on in real life, and that they were willing to share their feelings and gains, and give positive comments and suggestions on the group's activities.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates the feasibility of addressing parent-child relationship issues among migrant children through the perspective of empowerment theory. Professional group social work can be utilized to assist migrant children and their families in improving parent-child interaction and strengthening their relationship. The formation of a positive parent-child interaction is crucial to shape the stable personality of migrant children, creating a harmonious family atmosphere, adapting to current modernization, and cultivating the new generation of youth. The researchers reached the following conclusion: firstly, migrant children's families possess their own interlocking healing capacities. Parents play a crucial role in enhancing parent-child interactions for migrant children, and parental involvement can significantly influence the parent-child relationship. Changes in the level of interaction within the group and changes in the real family outside the group can have a series of knock-on effects on the family situation of migrant children. When one parent or child experiences a change in attitude or behavior, it can affect the cognitive, attitudinal, verbal, and behavioral changes of others, which can then extend to other families' scenarios. This can result in an interlocking ability to heal.

Secondly, the energy enhancement perspective has clearly theoretical advantages for intervening in the parent-child relationship of migrant children. This theory does not attribute problems in the parent-child relationship to personal subjective reasons, but rather to the fact that families are capable, emphasizing the interaction between individuals and families. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the communication and interaction between children and their parents during the practice process. This includes identifying and addressing any defects and deficiencies, which allows for effective intervention and eventual reconciliation.

Thirdly, the combination of the dynamic structure of the group and the interactive structure of the family is effective. The group relies on the interaction among its members to generate power during operations. The static and dynamic components of a group contribute to its overall effectiveness by generating motivation and power to achieve the group's goals. Similarly, interactions within families can promote self-motivation and foster positive parent-child relationships. By engaging in group activities, migrant families can come together to meet shared needs while addressing the unique needs of each family member. This can lead to significant improvements in parent-child interaction skills.

## 6. Suggest

It is necessary to conduct more of these groups to promote changes in family attitudes and actions and to cultivate the 'endogenous momentum' of mobile families. Firstly, parents should aim at reducing irrational beliefs and incorrect cognition. They should actively increase the frequency and duration of interactions, broaden the topics and content of discussion, and gain the necessary knowledge and skills for effective parent-child interaction. Additionally, it is important for parents to cultivate themselves and serve as positive role models for their children, sharing experiences of parent-child interaction can also be beneficial. Secondly, social organization's staff should help mobile families explore their own capabilities and strengths. They should connect social resources to create community spaces for parent-child interaction, hold regular lectures on parent-child interaction and education, and encourage mobile families to establish parent-child mutual-help teams. This will build a continuous and stable service system while assisting the government in categorizing and providing assistance to these families. Finally, the government has increased its advocacy efforts, provided support for social organizations to integrate social resources, introduced corresponding policies and regulations to enhance public attention to them, strengthened the investment of resources in family education, and cooperated with professional social organizations to provide professional assistance by purchasing corresponding social services for them. The aim is to improve the parent-child relationship for migrant children through multi-party cooperation.

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