

# THEY ARE ALSO PARENTS

A Study on Migrant Workers with  
Left-behind Children in China



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### “They are also parents”

– a study carried out in 2013 by the Center for Child Rights and Corporate Social Responsibility (CCR CSR) and the Facilitator, and supported by the CSR Centre of the Embassy of Sweden.

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## Foreword

*"Corporate Social Responsibility and children are like fish and water. If businesses fails to carry out CSR programs or protect migrant workers', how can they safeguard the rights and interests of children?"*

—HR manager

China’s vast internal migration – more than 260 million people who left home in search of work – is a story of hope but also of endurance and difficult reality. While for many, the move has brought improved financial situation and opportunities, it also came at a price of significant hardship to the workers and their families. More than 61 million children are currently left-behind in their hometowns by the parents, unable to provide for their upbringing and education in the large cities and industrial zones.

The separation results in a common sense of failure and anxiety for the parents and often in broken relationships with their children. It also leads to significant challenges for the companies hoping to maintain an efficient and stable workforce. More than 40% of parents we have interviewed have left work out of concern of their children and 9% have done so often.

Business can play an important role in improving the situation of the workers. In May 2012 UN Global Compact, UNICEF and Save the Children have launched a set of 10 principles (known as ‘Child Rights and Business Principles’) designed to guide business in promoting child rights in its operations. The findings of our report aim to provide further basis for action, including development of relevant CSR and human resources strategies.

As CCR CSR we are grateful for the trust which all participating parents, young workers and children have shown in sharing their stories, as well as for the initiative and leadership of our research partner, the Facilitator. Our thanks

also go out to the international brands and their value chain, who provided access to their factories – without their support this research would not have been possible.

The CSR Centre at the Embassy of Sweden has supported the completion of this study. The Centre's mission is to promote awareness and implementation of CSR in China, which also includes the worker's conditions.

Finally, thank you to all team members of CCR CSR, who worked to assure that we can complete and launch this unique study on China's working parents.



**Sanna Johnson**

Executive Director, CCR CSR

## Executive Summary

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The aim of this report was to highlight the issue of China's 61 million left-behind children from the perspective of their working parents. While the profound impact of long-term family separation on children's education, emotional wellbeing and long-term development is increasingly well documented, no study in the past has described the challenge this poses to working parents, and the impact of strained relationships on their work, wellbeing, and career decision-making.

From a business perspective, family issues are rarely factored into workforce stability, production efficiency or the final profit margins. However, as this report will show, the impact of family wellbeing on operations is critical, and the challenges and needs of working parents should be at the core of any company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy.

The research was carried out over June and July 2013, with our team interviewing over 1,500 migrant workers in nine factories located in the Pearl River Delta (PRD) and Chongqing. In addition 25 company and brand managers responsible for Human Resources (HR) and CSR practice provided input and their experience. Some of the main research findings were as follows:

- While children and the family are at the very center of working parents' needs, hopes and plans, there was a major discrepancy between the migrant workers' understanding of their responsibilities as parents and their actual ability to take on these responsibilities.
- Financial pressure, lack of sufficient time to attend to children, and problems with access to schooling meant that often the parents lacked the means to keep their children with them. At the same time there were often no suitable guardians back home to attend to the children.

- This meant for example, that over 80% parents of left-behind children reported feeling “inadequate” in their role as parents and 70% experienced strong feelings of guilt and anxiety as a result of separation, and the breakdown in communication and intimacy with their children. Many said they would move back home immediately if there were jobs available, and of the top five reasons parents reportedly considered resigning from their jobs, three were related to family issues, including “taking better care of their children.”
- Parents’ key expectations in terms of support included more flexible working hours (64%), assistance with housing (54%) and access to schooling for their children (72%). However less than a quarter of the workers surveyed felt they were supported as parents in the workplace.

While there is a general awareness of workers concerns at the company level, the assistance offered is still ad-hoc and leaves room for significant improvement. However, in the face of deepening labor shortage and significant challenges with turnover, migrant worker parents are likely to emerge as core of more stable and experienced workforce, proving to be a key asset to company operations. By taking the needs of migrant families into consideration, and helping to leverage community and government resources, companies are in position to make a profound difference in the lives of millions of workers, and to take lead in social services innovation.

## 1. Overview

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### 1.1 Why do migrant worker parents deserve greater attention?

According to a survey by the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2012 there were 262 million migrant workers in China. Of these, only 34 million were able to take their families with them when migrating away from home, leaving the vast majority separated from their loved ones. This happened partly due to limited access to education, health-care and other social services, which migrant population is entitled to away from home, as a result of China’s existing social registration (*hukou*) system. In face of the hardship, many parents choose to leave their children in the home village when migrating for work, and over time this separation gave rise to a highly vulnerable group of more than 61 million ‘left-behind children’ struggling with emotional and developmental problems. According to research conducted by UNICEF and the Committee for Children and Women under the State Council in 2005, left-behind children are prone to dysfunctional communication with their parents and significant problems with education.

On the other hand, the 29 million children who were able to migrate together with their family are also known to face substantial problems, due to the lack of time and financial means by their parents to provide a good upbringing. Because of their background and unequal distribution of educational resources, the migrant children are often isolated from their local peers and find it difficult to integrate. What’s more, because migrant children cannot attend college entrance examinations (*gao kao*) outside their hometowns, the majority are forced to return home to attend secondary schools, which effectively means they are once again left-behind.

Most research to date proves that parents’ work in the city has a significant negative effect on their children, who tend to be less optimistic and suffering from anxiety disorders, isolation, low self-esteem and self-awareness, depression, behavioral problems and diminished learning capacity. However,

problems of this kind not only threaten the healthy development of roughly 90 million children, but also the lives of millions of migrant workers – their parents and families.

Bearing these factors in mind, the purpose of this study is twofold:

- **To listen to the migrant workers, in order to establish a social support system aimed at creating a better environment for them and their children.**

A review of background literature for this study shows that the lack of a social support system makes it difficult for migrant parents to balance family finances and the needs of their children, and that the questions of who should provide the relevant support and by what means, are important to consider. To date, no previous study had properly addressed the questions on the relationship between migrant workers and their children, including migrant workers' awareness of parenting, the services and support needed, as well as the impact of family hardship on employment and parents' decision making. What's more, without the voice and perspective of the parents being taken into account, the policy and assistance provided to migrant families is unlikely to be effective. As such, this study reflects on the conditions and experiences of parent migrant workers, advocating that businesses and communities establish social-support systems, providing better growth environments for the children.

- **To solicit opinions from multinational corporations, suppliers and families, and explore possibilities for CSR action**

According to the 2011 survey of migrant workers by the National Bureau of Statistics, age and marital status play an important role in migrant workers choice of a workplace. Married and relatively older rural Chinese are more likely to work near home so that they can look after their families. However, as the younger generation of migrant workers marries and starts their own families, the issue of support provided by companies will be increasingly relevant to successful business operations.

According to the findings of this study, it is still very rare for business management to consider the needs of parent migrant workers and to provide them with appropriate support. Some companies invest in after-hours community schooling for left-behind children, while others cooperate with non-governmental and civil society organisations to provide migrant children and left-behind children with one-off or short-term public services such as reunion programs and teaching assistance. But few businesses invest in long-term services, as part of their social responsibility strategy. A 2011 report on "Chinese enterprise social responsibility" has shown that, of a sample 300 businesses, 70% were making no efforts to engage in CSR programs. Interviews carried out for this study also revealed that businesses largely had very limited knowledge of CSR – seeing it as more a concept than a systematic practice involving employee participation. As such, this research aims to promote participation in CSR programs by businesses in order to better assist migrant worker parents, and to provide relevant information on the protection of children's rights, social responsibility and public policy.

## **1.2 The migrant workers' children-relationship perspective**

An innovative aspect of this study is the emphasis it places on considering the issues discussed above from the child-parent-relationship perspective. As such, the migrant workers interviewed are divided into three broad categories: parents of migrant children, parents of left-behind children, and younger migrant workers who are not yet parents. The three groups differ in terms of family structure, motivation for taking up migrant work, the connection to their hometowns, and also their patterns of consumption. Classifying them into three categories helps us to get a better understanding about how children and their wellbeing influence their migrant worker parents.

It should be mentioned that migrant workers have previously been considered as a collective work force rather than as groups of diversified individuals. This study has been conducted in the hope that regarding migrant workers as individuals facing a variety of circumstances will provide for a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of their situation. As such, this study is

concerned with the following target groups:

- Parents of migrant children: migrant workers who live with their children in cities and industrial zones.
- Parents of left-behind children: migrant workers who leave their children in their hometowns.
- Young migrant workers: young generation workers who do not have children.
- Brand representatives from big multinational companies.
- Managers of Chinese supply factories.

### 1.3 Research methodology

The research was conducted in the Pearl River Delta (PRD) and Chongqing, providing an opportunity for cross-regional comparison. Each area developed under different circumstances – PRD as the seat of Special Economic Zones and China’s earliest manufacturing center, and Chongqing as a municipality set to drive the economic growth of the poorer western areas – and as such, each has a unique set of policies and its own approach towards migrant workers.

The Pearl River Delta traditionally attracted large numbers of migrants, and has since 2001 employed a ‘point-based’ system, allowing those with higher education and professional skills to qualify for local *hukou* registration. The number of workers actually able to transfer their *hukou* and to qualify for public services has however remained low.

On the other hand, Chongqing has aimed for a more ‘balanced’ urban development capable of accommodating its vast rural population. As such, the migrant workers are often able to transfer their *hukou* following 3-5 years of stable employment, and have a relatively easier access to a range of services, including cheaper public housing and access to schooling<sup>14-18</sup>. Despite the innovative policies, however, our research team found that in reality the workers faced a number of obstacles when trying to enroll their children in local schools and that ultimately, very few migrant parents took their children

with them, preferring instead to keep the children in nearby hometowns and to visit on a frequent basis.

The research methodology involved a combination of literature review, questionnaires, case interviews, and focus groups to guarantee valid and comprehensive results. A total of 1518 valid questionnaire surveys were collected from the migrant workers over June and July 2013, with the emphasis on the parents of left-behind children (50%), parents of migrant children (30%) and a sample of young migrant workers (20%). In addition, a series of in-depth interviews was held with 16 migrant workers and 25 managers from multinational companies and supply chain factories to better understand workers’ actual circumstances and the companies’ current perspective on the issue. The researchers also conducted interviews with 20 left-behind children and their guardians in rural Chongqing.

Figure 1: No. of interviews from different regions and groups

Region	Parents of left-behind children	Parents of migrant children	Non-parent migrant workers	Total
Chongqing	286	72	98	456
PRD	591	281	190	1062
Total	877	353	288	1518

The research process emphasized a multi-stakeholder perspective and on June 7, 2013, the researchers held a launch meeting in Zhuhai attended by representatives of brands, suppliers, factory management, migrant children schools, and migrant workers. The participants in the meeting provided valuable input to the research outline and the questionnaire.

In cooperation with a consultancy partner – Elevate – the research team has also organized a ‘Photo-Voice’ exercise for a group of 20 migrant workers, coaching them in basic photography skills, and over the following weeks guiding the workers to document their lives and tell their stories with the help of photography. The range of visual story-telling which followed, has added

a further valuable dimension to this study's understanding of the migrant parents perspective, and providing an important resource with which to raise awareness of their circumstances, hopes and needs.

Migrant workers were approached as research partners as well as participants, and the interviews and questionnaires conducted, have provided an opportunity to discuss and explain the purpose and value of our research, as well as to address any doubts or questions they had. Although the study was not educational in purpose, it did provide a good opportunity for the workers to reflect on their role as parents, and to gain access to relevant information and public services.

#### **1.4 Research team**

The study was commissioned and designed by the Center for Child Rights and Corporate Social Responsibility (CCR CSR), and carried out in partnership with the Beijing and Zhuhai branches of the Facilitator.

CCR CSR is a Swedish social enterprise based in Beijing, and providing business with expertise and services helping to facilitate a positive impact on the lives of children and young people. Over the last four years CCR CSR has built up a strong presence in the industry, and a track record of cooperation with Chinese authorities, civil society actors, as well as international brands and supply chain companies. The team includes professionals with significant experience of work in the government, civil society, academia and a range of international institutions, such as UN and the World Bank.

Facilitator, is one of the first local NGOs in the mainland China serving migrant communities. The organization works with government, companies, volunteers and other organizations to support the living conditions and development of migrant workers and their children in Beijing, Yangtze River and Pearl River deltas. Through its offices in Beijing, Nanjing and Zhuhai, Facilitator works on community development, empowerment and capacity building, as well as policy advocacy, and general support for local migrant workers and migrant children. The three offices form a strategic cooperation network, supporting

each other's work. Facilitator's team at large includes 20 full time staff with different backgrounds, ranging from media, companies, and professional NGOs, to social workers who were migrant workers before. It has also a national network of more than 2000 volunteers.

In the past decade, more than 400,000 migrant workers and migrant children have received direct services from the Facilitator. Eight surveys and reports, including *The status of Migrant workers Vocational Safety and Health*, *The Evaluation on Public policies and services from Migrant workers view*, *The Demands and Obstacles of Migrant workers development*, *Financial Crisis Impact on migrant workers* have been conducted and published by Facilitator leading to policy change at the different levels of the government.

## 2. The impact of migration on families

### 2.1 Age, education and place of residence

More than a half of parents – in particular the parents of migrant children – interviewed for our research were 30-39 years old. The age differences extended to their families, where the left-behind children tended to be between 2-6 years old, while most migrant children were between 7-10 years old. Most of families had only one (42%) or two children (30%), with majority of boys.

Most migrant-worker parents lived in dormitories provided by their employer, or in rental housing. Very few have been able to successfully apply for in-factory accommodation suitable for families. In Chongqing, workers were more likely to bring their parents to the city to look after the grandchildren because their hometowns are generally closer.

In terms of education, around half of migrant-worker parents had only completed middle school, with some 16% completing further vocational school education. By comparison, the younger migrant workers who are yet to be parents, had higher rates of vocational training (45%), with only 23% completing their education at the middle school level.

The children's education-status varied depending on the area studied. In Chongqing, the majority of migrant children were preschoolers, since school-aged children are more likely to be sent to schools in their hometown. In the PRD, migrant children were generally elementary school and junior grade, as parents tend to take school-age children to the city.

A literature review revealed that the numbers of both left-behind and migrant children, in particular the preschoolers, have rapidly increased. The study also found that once children move away their hometowns, it is rare for them to return.

### 2.2 Motivations, approaches to finding jobs and household economy

**Young migrant workers left home in pursuit of personal opportunity, while migrant-worker parents tend to do so for their children's well being.**

Most young migrant workers work away from their hometowns for two-to-five years. The majority (66%) is initially motivated by self-development, and this was still the case after several years of work.

#### **Main source of income, wage-levels and spending**

The survey showed that 82% of migrant worker parents have agricultural household registrations (*hukou*), and 77% have farmland in their hometowns, but their main source of income is migrant labor.

The level of payment corresponded to workers' age and work experience. On average the parents of migrant children earned higher wages (CNY 2,500 per month) than the parents of children left-behind. About a third of all surveyed parents and less than half young workers earned CNY 2000 or less per month.

On average, parent migrant workers spend half their wages on their children, and around a third on living expenses. Due to the high costs of raising children, migrant-worker parents are under a significant financial pressure, and generally have high-income expectations.

#### **Migrant-worker parents generally rely on personal networks to find jobs**

Most migrant-worker parents found their work through personal networks and factory recruitment sessions. Young migrant workers were more likely to rely on their schools to find jobs. In Chongqing, where more parents had tertiary schooling and basic computer literacy, around 40% of the workers have found their jobs online.

Figure 2: Initial reasons for becoming a migrant worker (multiple choice)

The initial reason to become a migrant worker	Young migrant workers	Parent migrant workers
Improved self-development	67%	40%
To support parents	44%	46%
Lack of opportunities in hometown	19%	45%
Don't know	19%	10%
Unemployment among friends	17%	10%
Save money to build a home, buy equipment for improved agricultural production	15%	25%
Enjoy city life	13%	6%
Escape from family and social problems	6%	2%
A better life for children	3%	58%

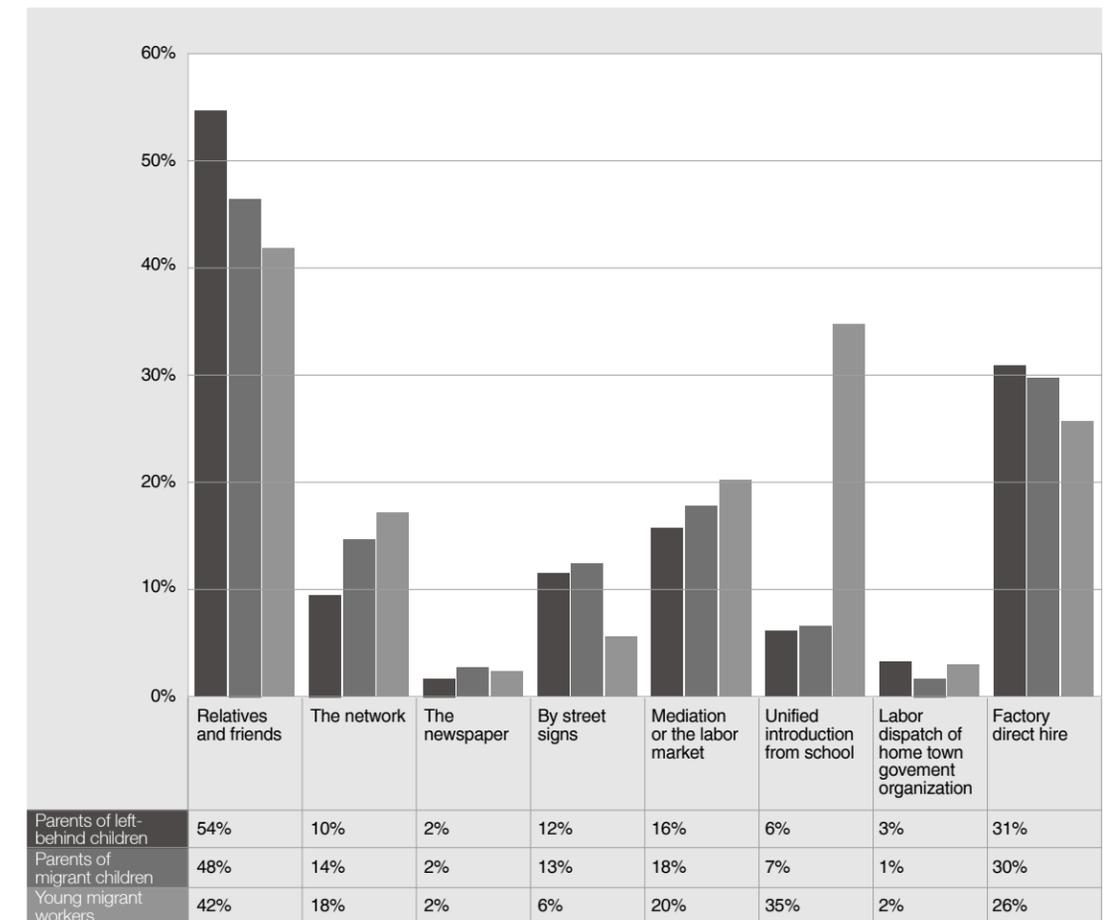
Figure 3: Subsequent reasons for becoming a migrant worker (multiple choice)

Subsequent reasons for becoming a migrant worker	Young migrant workers	Parent migrant workers
Improved self-development	60%	34%
To support parents	40%	29%
Lack of opportunities in hometown	31%	60%
Enjoy city life	18%	9%
No change from original reason	13%	13%
Staying on without goals	9%	5%
Better education for children	8%	64%

### 2.3 The impact of migrant labour on families and children

The majority of migrant workers (60%) agreed that working away from home had a positive financial impact on their families, and – in case of the migrant children – could help with broadening the children’s horizons and educational opportunities.

Figure 4: Job-seeking methods (multiple choice)



However, regardless of whether parents were able to take their children with them, most have described a strong negative impact which migration had on parent-child intimacy and communication. Overall, more than half of migrant workers were dissatisfied with the relationships with their children, while 40% said that their relationships had become more remote since they took up work in the city (Figure 5). The situation was particularly hard for the parents of left-behind children, where the feeling of a reduced family intimacy grew the longer the parents were away.

As such, an increasing number of migrant workers were concerned about how to communicate with and to educate their children (Figure 6), particularly in face of extensive working hours.

It should be added that male migrant workers in general had more positive feelings about the situation, with some fathers going as far as to say that the migration had a good influence on their relationships with children. The male migrant workers were focused on economic factors, and as such were far less sensitive about parent-children relationships than female migrant workers. Another finding was that in both the PRD and in Chongqing, better-educated migrant workers (college-level and above) were more likely to be dissatisfied with their family relationships.

*Jiang Shuilian's oldest son is now 18 years old, but she says she is still sad when she remembers having to wait until he was six, before he could join her in the city. She says at that time the boy disliked her and wanted to go back to the village. It took him about three months to get used to life in the city. Jiang thinks that because she did not spend time with him when he was little, the boy refused to listen to her. Because of this, Jiang has looked after her other, younger son, since he was very young.*

Figure 5: Impact of migrant labor on parent-child relationships

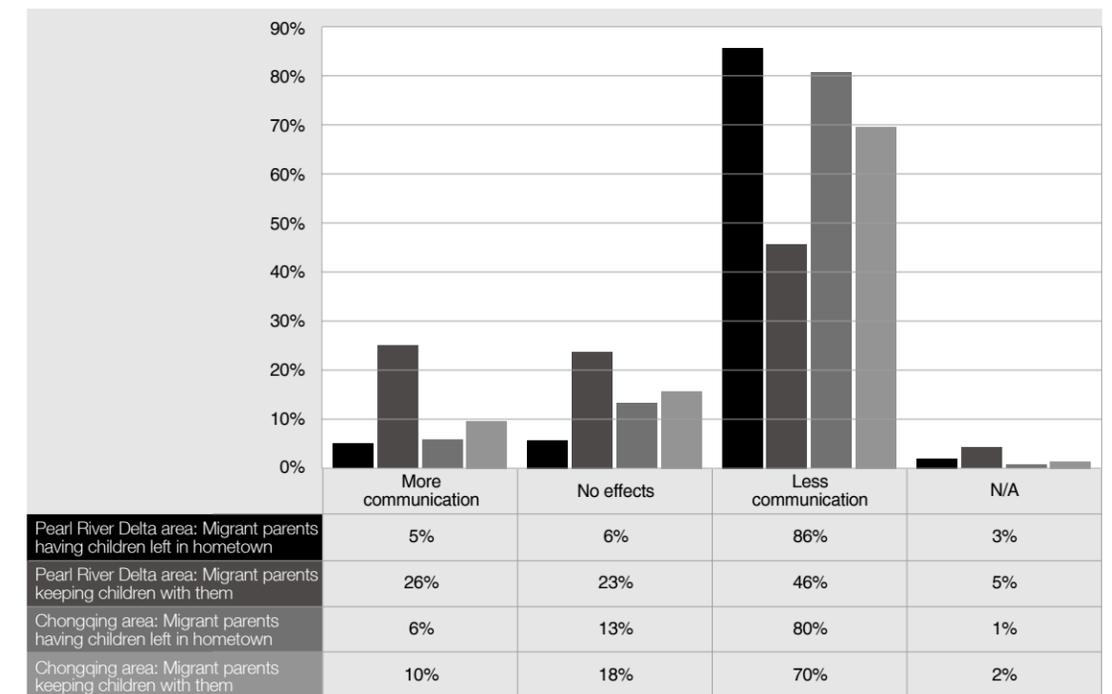


Figure 6: Changes in family relations based on length of separation

	Length of separation	Reduced intimacy	No effect	Improved intimacy	No opinion
Parents of left-behind children	Less than 2 years	47%	22%	25%	6%
	2-5 years	61%	22%	12%	3%
	6-9 years	65%	24%	8%	2%
	More than 10 years	74%	15%	9%	2%
Parents of migrant children	Less than 2 years	28%	33%	11%	17%
	2-5 years	36%	57%	7%	0%
	6-9 years	52%	38%	6%	4%
	Above 10 years	49%	44%	7%	0%
Young migrant workers	Less than 2 years	60%	18%	16%	6%
	2-5 years	54%	29%	14%	0%
	6-9 years	61%	20%	17%	0%
	Above 10 years	56%	22%	11%	0%

### 3. Situation analysis and challenges for migrant workers with children

#### 3.1 The workers' understanding of parenthood

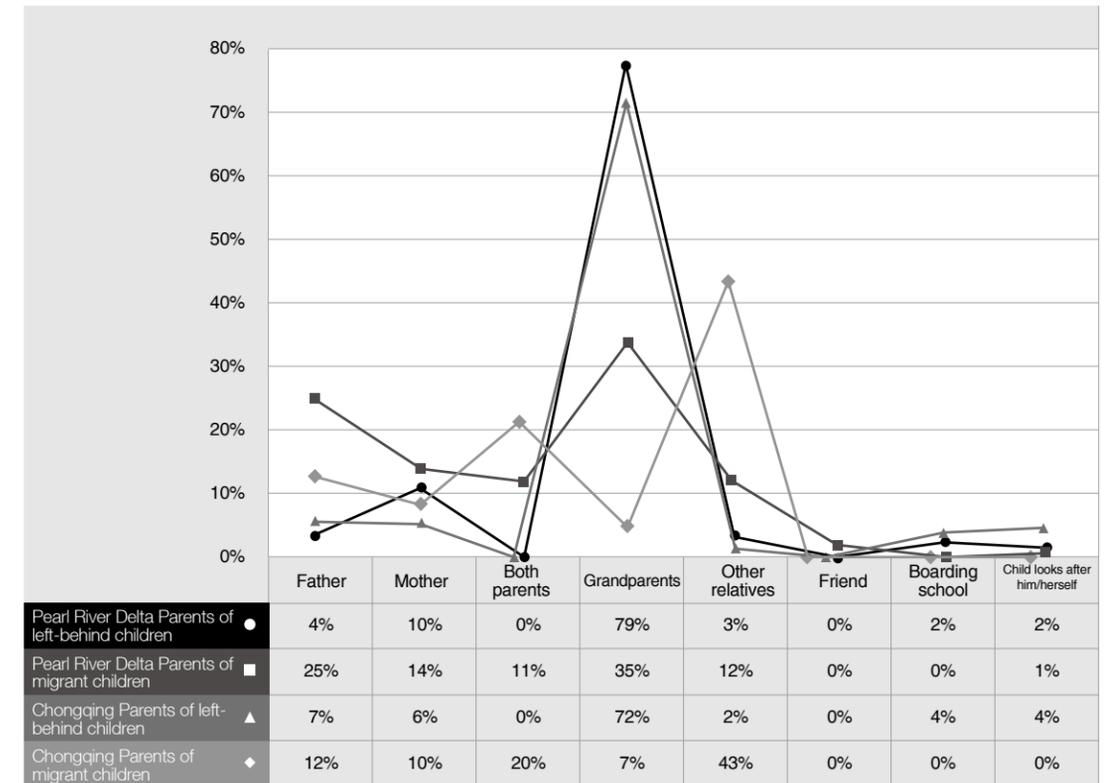
**There is a major discrepancy between migrant workers' understanding of their responsibilities as parents and their actual ability to fulfill them**

The majority of migrant worker parents (92%) said they believe raising children is the responsibility of both parents. Most of the younger migrants (70%) also stated that they would want to look after their children themselves. However, as illustrated in the table below (Figure 7) it is the grandparents and other relatives that make for majority of migrant children's actual caregivers. Only a quarter of parents interviewed throughout this research said that at least one of them was able to look after their child, and majority faced significant difficulties with arranging for appropriate guardian at home.

All of the migrant workers, regardless of their background, felt that their key responsibility as parents involved the child's sound psychological development and good social skills (79%). This came ahead of education (74%), health and other basic needs, most likely reflecting the workers acute concern about the environment in which their children were growing up. Throughout the interviews, both migrant workers, as well as company and factory managers, expressed their worry about left-behind children feeling inferior and alienated from their families (Figure 8).

*Twelve-year-old Xiaohang speaks in such a quiet voice, that at first the interviewer had to play a game with him to encourage him to speak up. When he was eight years old, his mother died of cancer. His father left him in the care of his paternal aunt and went to Guangzhou to sell flowers. The room that Xiaohang and his aunt lived in was pitch-black and the boy's aunt and another relative told the interviewer that Xiaohang barely talked to them at*

Figure 7: Who should take care of the children? (multiple choice)



*all, and they never knew what he was thinking. They wondered whether he might have some kind of psychological problem.*

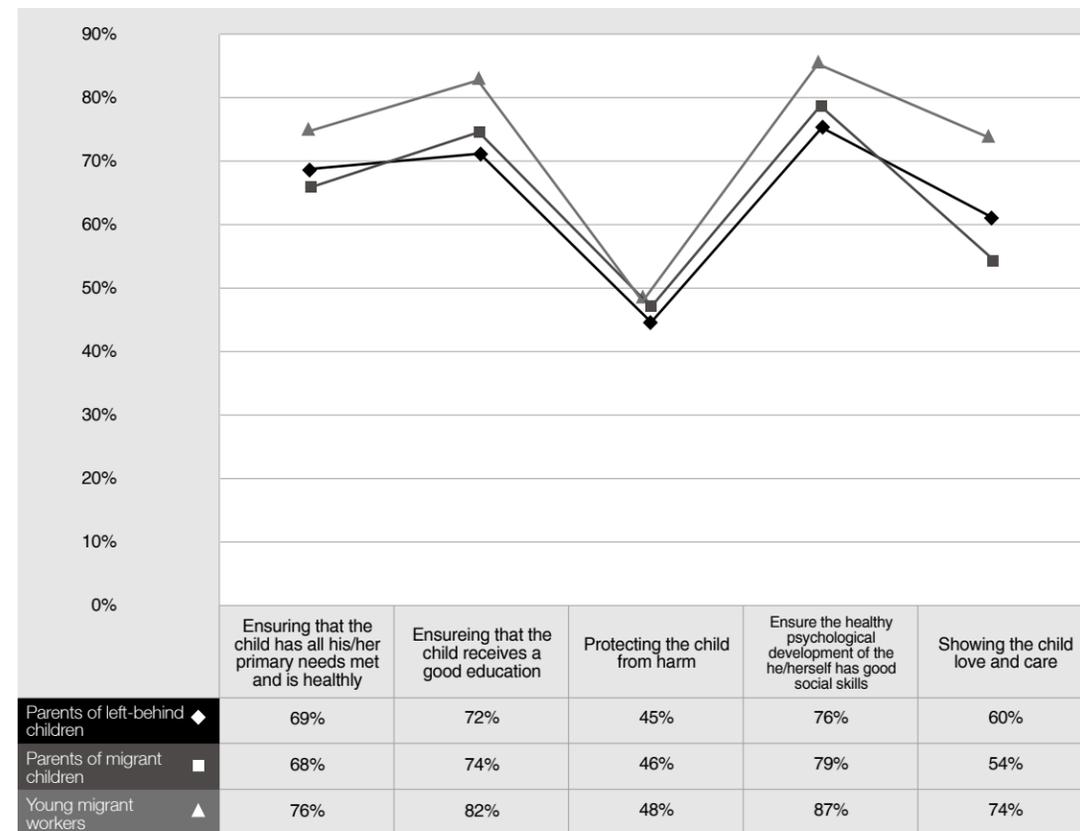
*Xiaohang said that he did not want to go and live with his father in Guangzhou because he didn't have any friends there and he couldn't speak Cantonese. But at the same time, he also said that his greatest wish was to live with his dad. The boy was struggling with mixed feelings and emotions.*

#### Lack of understanding about children's needs at various stages of development limits communication between migrant workers and their children

When asked about communication with their children, migrant workers said they were concerned about a range of issues, including "children's personality and psychological well-being," their "academic performance," their "parent-child relationship," and overall happiness. However, of the 20 left-behind

children interviewed by the research team, each said that when their parents called them, the main topic of conversation was always their studies.

Figure 8: Responsibilities regarded as most important by migrant workers in raising children (multiple choice)



12-year-old Xiaohang didn't know what to say to his dad. "I think all he cares about is my schoolwork. Maybe next time I'll try to talk to him about something else so that he knows what's on my mind."

When 14-year-old Xiaoyuan is on the phone to his mother, he always asks how she is, and she always replies, "If you are in school, then it doesn't matter how tired your mum is or how hard she's working; it's worth it." He says when she speaks like this he gets emotional, but thinks that because his results in math are never good, he's letting his mother down.

Guishan, 15, says that for as long as he can remember his father has been working away from home. He once asked his father what kind of work he does, but his father simply replied, "You just concentrate on your studies." Guishan says that he's used to this. The boy adds that he actually doesn't even want to know what kind of work his dad does because his father has

Figure 9: Reasons migrant workers feel children should live with their parents (multiple choice)

Region		Left-behind children parents	Migrant children parents	Young worker without children
PRD	Parents should be with their children; intimate relationships are beneficial to children's physical and mental growth	87%	89%	90%
	Parents need to be with their children; emotional pressure is greater when children are not around	56%	41%	44%
	Being there to provide supervision for children's education is important	73%	66%	59%
	Being there can promote children's social integration	44%	34%	51%
	Guide children with values	58%	47%	73%
	Protecting and comforting children is important	40%	30%	37%
	Supporting children's comprehensive development is important	66%	61%	73%
Chongqing	Parents should accompany their children; intimate relationships are beneficial to children's physical and mental growth	86%	99%	93%
	Parents need to be with their children; emotional pressure is greater when children are not around	50%	42%	33%
	Being there to provide supervision for children's education is important	64%	74%	56%
	Being there can promote children's social integration	35%	49%	47%
	Guide children with values	53%	66%	70%
	Protect and comfort children	29%	32%	36%
	Support children's comprehensive development	56%	64%	78%

never talked about it and he feels that if he knew, he might worry about it. 12-year-old Liu Xing’s parents only seem to care about his results in school and how his studies are coming along. Sometimes Liu Xing talks on the phone with his big brother, and when they talk, it’s also about how his studies are going.

The examples above suggest that migrant workers have a limited understanding of their children’s varied needs, and little ability to communicate. Children’s relationships with other relatives, their teachers and classmates and their potential role in healthy development also received very little attention (less than 10% of answers) from the parents.

**Majority of migrant workers described themselves as 'inadequate parents.'**

Most parents of left-behind children (82%) and just over half of parents of migrant children saw themselves as inadequate. The main reasons included lack of sufficient time to be together and communicate, as well as inability to provide appropriate guidance and quality education to their kids. Many workers felt they couldn’t even guarantee their children’s basic health and material wellbeing.

Figure 10: Migrant workers’ evaluation of how their children perceive them in their roles as parents

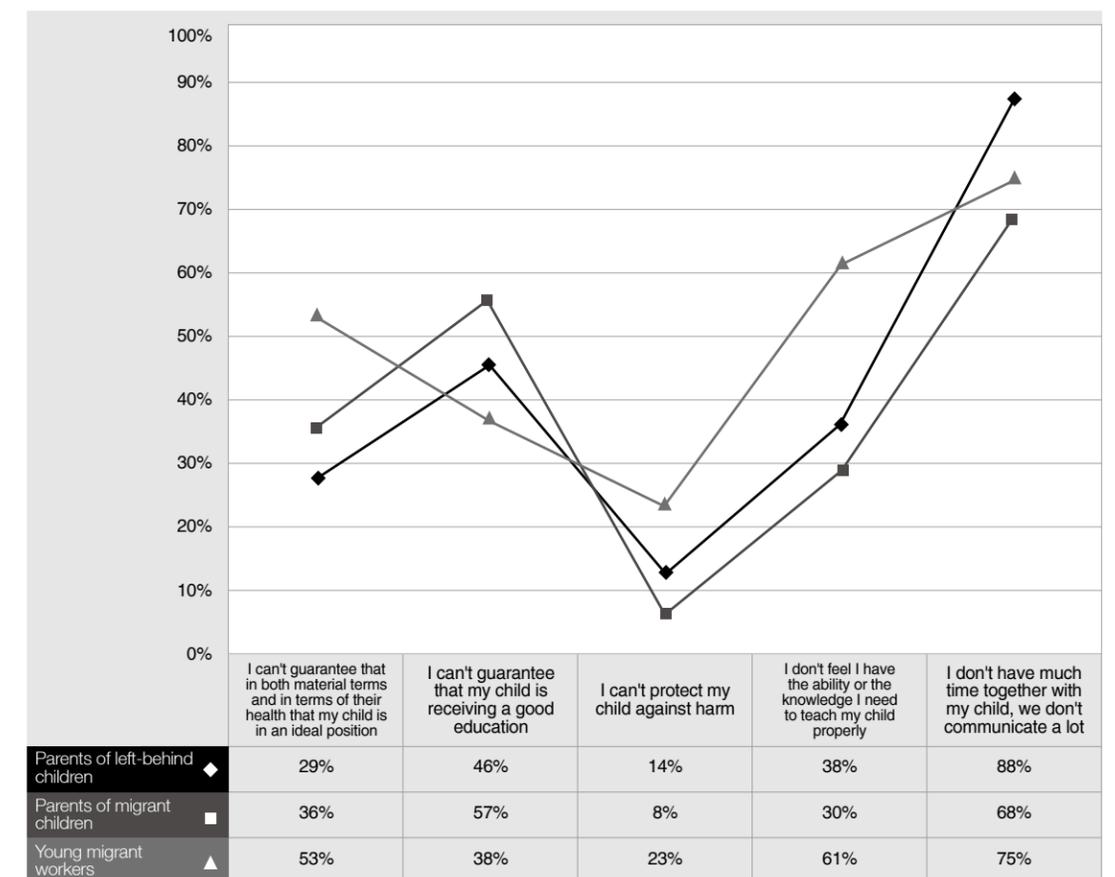
Does your child feel that you are adequate parents?				
Region	Type of parents	Yes	I've never heard my child talk about that	No
PRD	Parents of left-behind children	14%	42%	44%
	Parents of migrant children	44%	37%	19%
Chongqing	Parents of left-behind children	19%	39%	42%
	Parents of migrant children	23%	52%	25%

Often, the parents spent an average of 11 hours per day at work, without enough time to attend to their kids, and taking alternate day or night shifts in order to be able to attend to the children at all.

Parents of left-behind children were 8% more likely than parents of migrant children to feel that they did not know enough to provide proper guidance to their children. The feelings of failure as parents were visibly higher in the Pearl River Delta (by 12%), possibly reflecting the huge impact made by the distance from home.

When the left-behind and migrant children we talked to described their parents as inadequate, they said that when they missed them or needed their

Figure 11: Reasons migrant workers see themselves as inadequate parents



help, the parents “were never around.” They also complained of spending very little time together, which meant that there was “no real emotional connection.”

For left-behind children, a sense of longing or missing their parents was the primary problem; on the other hand, migrant children said they longed for their parents to understand them. However, most of the parents interviewed have never considered the children’s experience, feelings or perspective.

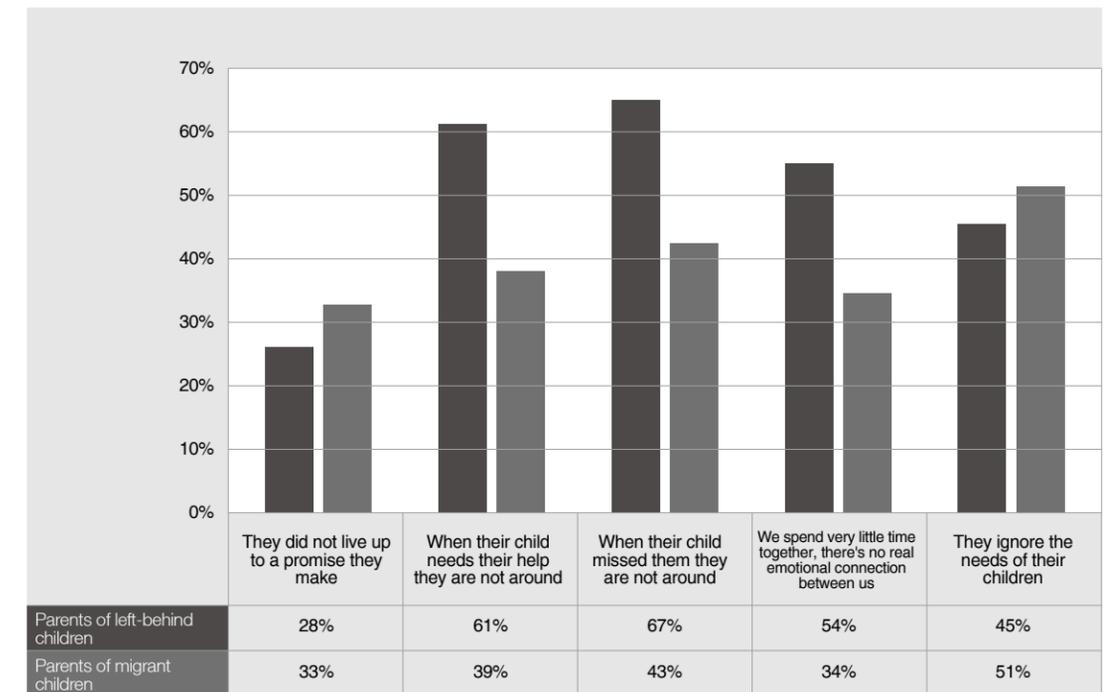
Figure 12: Migrant workers and their role as parents

Area	Status	are/will be a good parent	
		are/will be	no/will not be
PRD	Migrant workers with left-behind children	14%	86%
	Migrant workers with children	49%	51%
	Young workers	75%	25%
Chongqing	Migrant workers with left behind children	26%	74%
	Migrant workers with children	45%	55%
	Young workers	73%	27%

Almost all migrant workers interviewed (close to 90%) thought the children should be with their parents, either because it ensured their healthy development, allowed for guidance in education or helped to guarantee their safety. The few workers that felt otherwise, said that they wanted to have children by their side, but didn’t have the means to do so and felt helpless as a result.

*Fourteen-year-old left-behind child Xiao Yuan says, “When I miss them, I look up at the sky and I think about something that we’ve done together in the past. But I don’t tell mum and dad, because I don’t think it would make any difference to them if they knew or not”. After saying this, Xiao Yuan fell silent.*

Figure 13: Reasons that children of migrant workers think their parents are inadequate



**Prospects for settling in the city and children’s career choice**

Nearly 90% of migrant workers hope that their children will be able to stay in the city, due to opportunities for better life and personal growth, as well as, in some cases, a chance to escape the hardships of life as a farmer. However, only a third said they were confident that their children would actually be able to settle in the city. Almost half of those asked said they were not sure. Partly as a result of effective government policies (described in Section I) and their own initiative, migrant workers in Chongqing felt more confident about their children’s prospects in the city.

Only 12% of interviewed workers stated they did not want their children to remain in the city. The main reasons were that opportunities in rural China are increasing (36%), while the urban environment was unhealthy (30%), the housing unaffordable (26%), and life in general too exhausting (25%).

There were also several larger trends in terms of career preference for the workers’ children. Migrant workers with urban household registrations

(hukou) tended to hope that their children would become civil servants or find positions in business management. Those with agricultural hukou, on the other hand, largely hoped that their children would find employment in professional and technical fields. Overall, majority of parents (over 50%) did indicate that they would support their children’s personal choices.

### 3.2 Challenges of raising children as a migrant worker

#### The key factors leading to family separation

The three main reasons for migrant workers being unable to keep their children with them in the city are:

- the lack of time to look after children (68%)
- a struggle to cover the basic living costs (53%)
- inability to secure an equal level of education and other social services (30%)

Figure 14: Reasons that parents leave their children behind (multiple choice)

Reason for not having child/ children with them	Parents of left-behind children in the PRD region	Parents of left-behind children in the Chongqing region
Children cannot take the college entrance exam away from our hometown	28%	26%
Living costs in the city too high	53%	52%
No time to take care of children	72%	59%
Worried it will affect my work	18%	19%
Environment at home is safer	15%	17%
Problems with access to local schools	33%	20%

The main differences between the parents of left-behind children in the PRD and those in Chongqing were that workers in the PRD were more likely to feel they had “no time” to look after their children and that the challenges of getting their children into schools near where they worked were overwhelming. As has been noted above, the parents of left-behind children in Chongqing

tended to be closer to home, returned home more often, and generally spent more time with their children. In addition, primary and middle schools in Chongqing are open to the children of migrant workers, and do not require additional fees, often charged to children without local household registration.

Figure 15: Difficulties faced by parents of migrant children (multiple choice)

Difficulties	PRD	Chongqing
Increased financial pressure	62%	61%
No time to educate my child	46%	54%
Worry my child will fall into bad company	26%	19%
I don’t know how to deal with my relationship with my child effectively	15%	7%
Work pressure leaves me with practically no time to myself	33%	36%
I don’t know how to help my child with their studies	42%	25%
No difficulties	7%	11%

Both parents of left-behind children and migrant children said that they worried about what would happen when their children reached adolescence. Both groups indicated that they hoped they would be able to have closer contact with their children and give them better guidance during this period. However, as a result of financial and social service limitations, parents said they usually decide to send their adolescent children back to their hometowns to attend school.

*“This year our oldest daughter is attending third grade of middle school,” says Ou Haisheng, “We’re worried because the exam-scores required to get into a high school in Zhuhai are quite steep. Back in our hometown they give you extra points if you’re from a household with only female offspring, so we sent our daughter back to finish the third grade.*

*But the financial pressure is still huge, and when we went back for Chinese New Year, our daughter’s classmates were saying that she’d been going to*

internet cafés. I was worried she was becoming addicted, but we're so far away from her, that we wouldn't have a clue if there was a problem. During the summer holidays I went back again and brought her back here".

**The impact on work performance and employment stability**

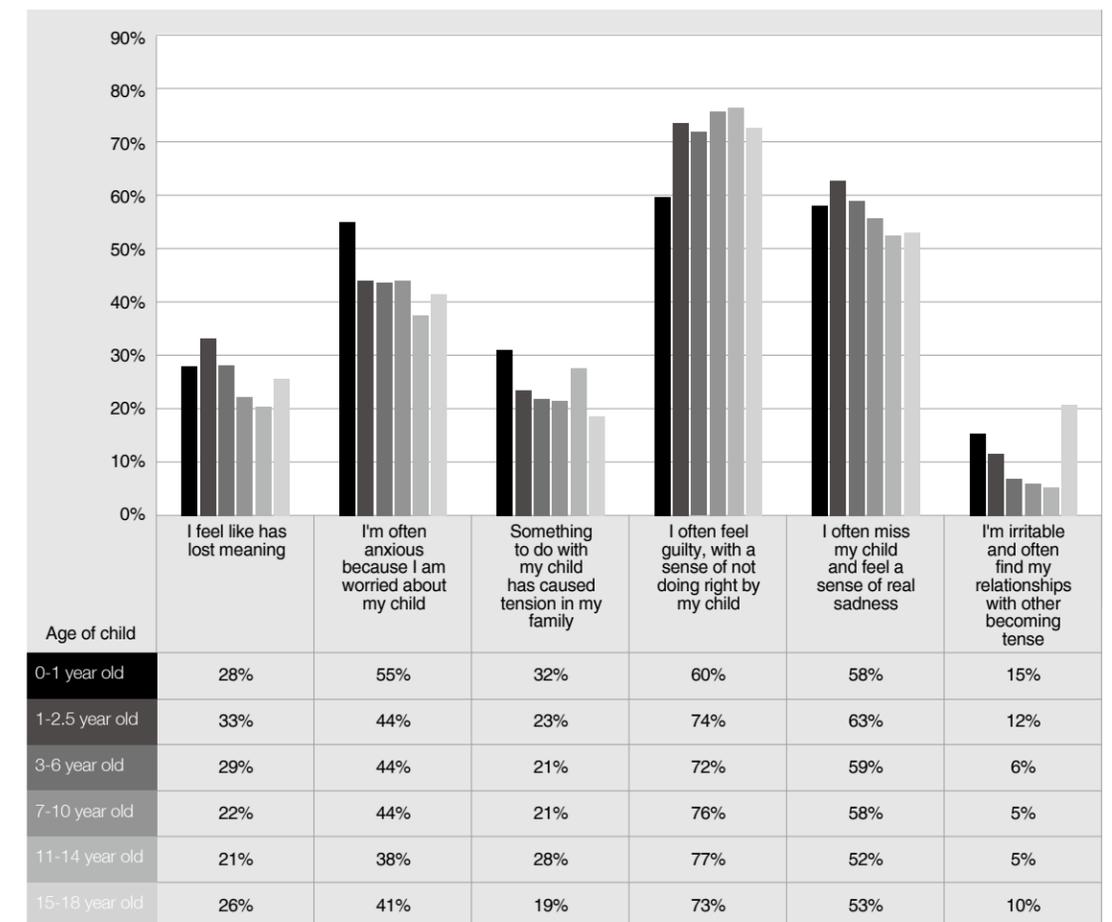
Being away from their children had a clear impact on the work performance of migrant parents, with many feeling distracted and lacking commitment to the job (59%); others making frequent errors due to their worry about children (38%); and some feeling unhappy and unenthusiastic (33%).

This study found that the impact on the work of the parents of left-behind children is greatest when the children are still infants, and again when they reach adolescence. In comparison, the impact on parents of the migrant children is relatively smaller. As noted before, these parents are often among the most stable of all workers. However, overall, among the top 5 reasons for quitting work, 3 were family related, including "taking better care of the child" (Figure 16). At least 42% of interviewed workers have in the past left their job because their children, and 9% have done so often.

Figure 16: Reasons for migrant parents to leave employment

Reason for resignation	Migrant parents with left behind children	Migrant parents keeping children with them
Better taking care of children	46%	52%
For older people ate home	29%	17%
Better self development	26%	19%
Bored with previous job	12%	8%
For marriage and children	27%	22%
Too much pressure at work	8%	4%
Desiring better management	9%	8%
Bad working condition	19%	22%

Figure 17: Impact of parenthood on the lives of migrant workers (multiple choice)



The majority of the parents of left-behind children we interviewed in Chongqing have previously worked in other economically developed provinces, such as Guangdong, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu. The main reason that they had moved back to Chongqing was to be closer to home, making it easier to take care of their children. As shown in the figure below, the concerns for children's health, education, and appropriate care played a major role in the decision to leave work and to return home. It is therefore in the company's interest that the workers are not separated from their children and have opportunities to address the challenges to their family's wellbeing.

On the other hand the parents of migrant children are more likely to resign because their children cannot attend schools close to their workplace. The

quality of education received and safe environment for the children are among the most important factors considered in evaluating the workplace.

Figure 18: Reasons migrant workers leave their employment (multiple choice)

Reason for resignation	Migrant parents with left-behind children	Migrant parents with children
Not enough holidays to be reunited with children	37%	12%
To be closer to home so that I can educate children	53%	38%
There was no one to look after children	52%	43%
My child had a problem at school or with his/her health	57%	40%
My wages were too low to pay for children's needs	35%	38%
Children cannot attend school where I work	18%	37%
The quality of education where I work is poor	7%	17%
Social environment in the area where I work is poor	11%	23%
Company had no policy regarding pregnant women, so it was unsuitable for me to continue to work there	4%	5%

Worker retention is an important factor in the rising labor cost. While companies hope for a stable workforce, the experience and hardship of migrant labor can have an influence on the workers' decision to resign. The well-being of parents has also a strong impact on the development of left-behind and migrant children. These children will one day become employees themselves, and whether considering the development of business or of society at large, the current lack of support for migrant workers and their children is a significant social issue.

### 3.3 Consequences of work on parenthood

The strained relationships of workers with their children were cause of a range of powerful emotions with 73% of respondents often feeling "guilty," 57%

Figure 19: Reasons why migrant workers remain in the city (multiple choice)

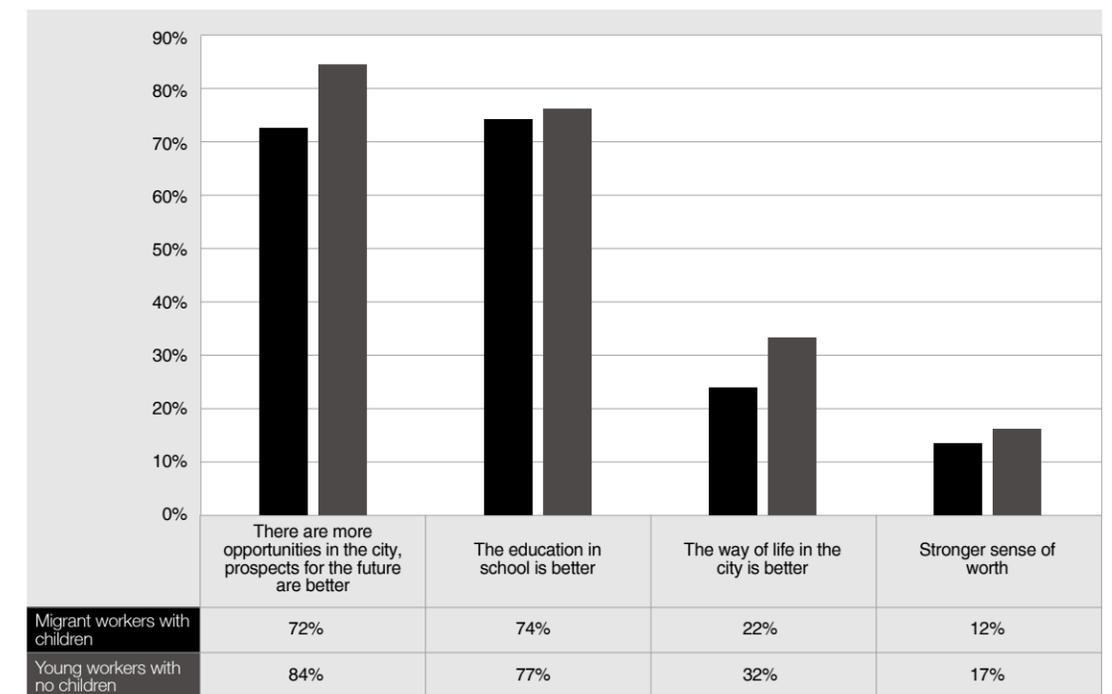
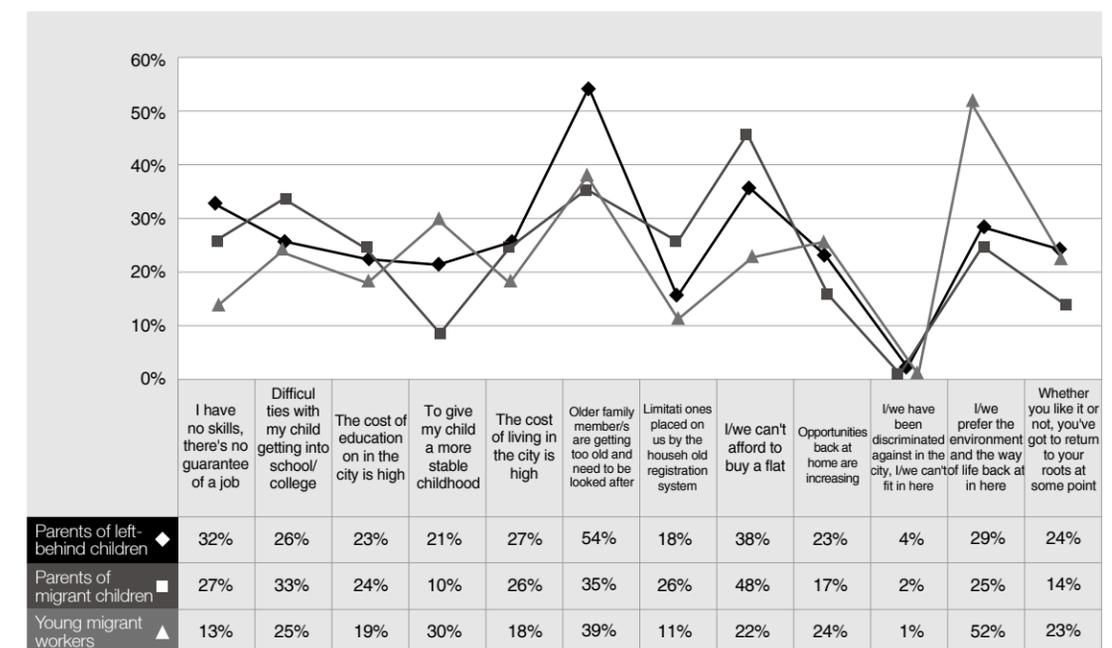


Figure 20: Reasons why migrant workers decide to return home (multiple choice)



saying they missed their children and felt extremely sad, and 43% saying they were “anxious.”

Guilt and a sense of not doing the right thing were felt most strongly by parents of left-behind children. Such feelings were common with regard to children in every age group but especially prevalent (77%) among parents of 11 to 14-year-old, left-behind children, who began to enter adolescence. They often experienced a host of emotional and personal problems, and the consequences of separation from the parents could become highly problematic.

*“I heard that when they call home, their kids sometimes are not very responsive,” says a factory manager, puzzling over the hardships of being a parent of left-behind children. “If you make a phone call and your child doesn’t really want to talk to you, it must be a horrible feeling.”*

Interviews made it clear that migrant workers who had actually experienced such feelings found it hard to talk about. One couple started out working at the factory floor before gradually working their way up to positions of managerial assistants. They are a success story compared to many other workers, but their oldest child refuses to talk to them. He is cold, and often even hostile.

*“We have to make sure he has what he needs; we’re his mum and dad, if not that then we’re nothing,” they say. When we asked what they plan to do about the relationship, they shake their heads and gaze blankly into the distance. “It’s not going to change; there’s nothing we can do about it ...”*

As mentioned before, parents of left-behind children in the PRD were much more likely to feel guilt, loss, sadness and inadequacy than parents in Chongqing. Distance is clearly a very important factor, since it makes frequent visits home difficult, and as western and central regions of China (including Chongqing) began to industrialize, increasing number of migrant workers chose to find employment closer to home.

In 2011, the overall number of migrant workers leaving their own province for work dropped nationwide. This marked a symbolic tipping point in the national pattern of migration, where for the first time, majority of migrant workers were working in their home province.

Over half of the workers interviewed for this study believed that the parents needed their children’s love and presence, and that the pain and psychological pressure of separation had a significant impact. The parents of migrant children in particular said they did not mind the extra work and burden required to keep their children by their side. Despite more hectic schedules and very little time to themselves, they felt happier.

*“Even though I’m absolutely exhausted, when I get off work I have to do the laundry, take a shower and even if it’s 10 pm, I have to watch over my boy doing his homework before I can sleep. But the fact that I can be with my child means that I feel content,” says migrant worker Jiang Shuilian.*

*“If the whole family was together, then at least I could talk to them and look after my child a little better,” says Ou Haisheng, describing his greatest wish. “My eldest daughter is back home in the downtown area, my own parents are at home in the countryside, and we [Ou’s younger daughter and the couple themselves] are in City Z. The family is in three different places, and it really doesn’t feel good. When my children are with us, no matter how hard things are and how tired you are, it’s good to see your kids and chat with them; at least you feel a little more relaxed. If my kids aren’t with me, I’m always having negative thoughts at the factory. I feel lonely and I miss my children. I can’t always be calling them, and we can’t coordinate our time to talk either ... if there were jobs back at home then I’d definitely quit and go back home to find work so I could be closer to my children. The last time I came back from Hebei, I was always thinking about how there was no one to look after my daughter. I missed her and she missed me too.”*

### 3.4 Returning back home?

The workers often had no choice but to return home in order to care for their own ailing parents – who in turn frequently serve as the main caregivers of the left-behind children. As one of the factory managers stated in the interview “more than 70% of staff eventually resign to go home and look after their parents.” For the parents of migrant children, an additional reason to return home was their inability to buy an affordable housing – often a key factor to remaining in the city.

Figure 21: Return home or remain in the city?

Region	Workers	In the future workers hope to:	
		Remain in the city	Return home
PRD	Parents of left-behind children	27%	73%
	Parents of migrant children	63%	37%
	Young workers with no children	48%	52%
Chongqing	Parents of left-behind children	47%	53%
	Parents of migrant children	63%	37%
	Young workers with no children	78%	22%

The main reason for young migrant workers with no children to return home is their longing for a familiar environment and way of life. Often they have grown up as left-behind or migrant children themselves and their perception of the city is that of a place associated with painful experiences, pressure of competition and polluted environment. This marks a profound lack of belonging to a place, as well as the wish of young workers to give their own children the stable childhoods they never had themselves.

## 4. Making the right choice

### 4.1 Children are a critical factor in migrant workers’ choice of occupation

In both the PRD and Chongqing, and regardless of occupation, stable income and sufficiently high salaries were a priority for at least half of the migrant workers. A common complaint was that “without extra hours, the basic salary is far from sufficient to meet living expenses”, suggesting workers took on extra hours simply because they had no other alternative.

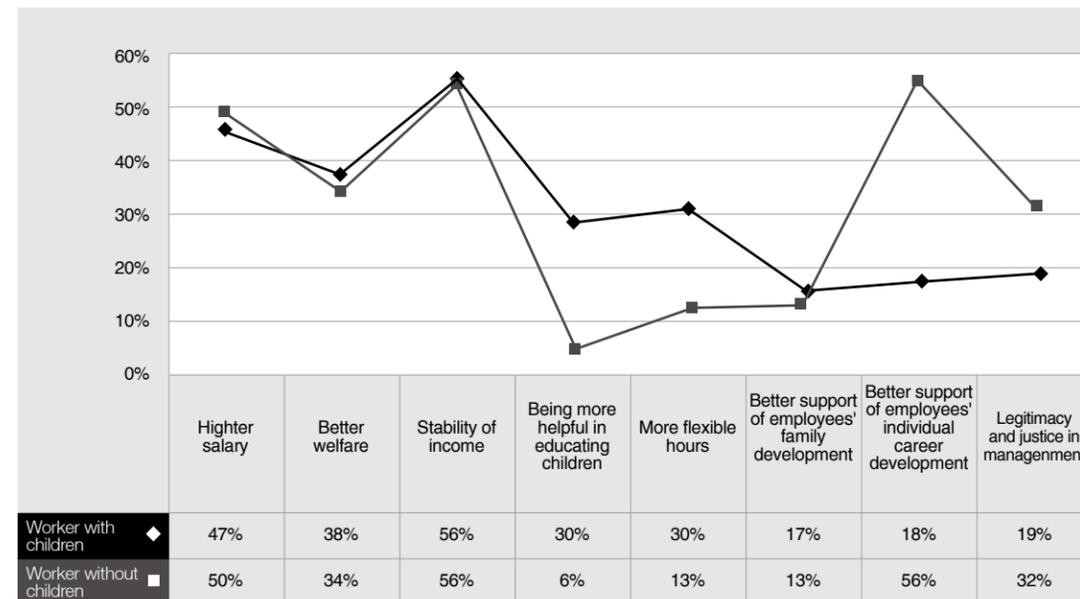
What’s more, the stability of workers’ incomes was further affected by the seasonal fluctuation of orders from around the world and the situation contributed to high turnover rates. “If there’s no extra income from overtime available for two consecutive months, workers leave straight away”, one company manager reported.

“Frankly speaking, workers always lack a sense of security, no matter which company they’re working for. This leads to a lack of a sense of belonging ... and without a sense of belonging, workers are constantly anxious about being fired,” said one employer in an interview.

While the younger workers emphasize their personal career development (56%), migrant worker parents put the well-being of their children first. As such, the stability and level of their income, as well as flexible working hours and support towards children’s education remain at the top of their work-related concerns. Because of this, it is in companies’ interest to facilitate easier childcare and to promote management culture aware and supportive of the workers’ family related needs.

In terms of regional differences (Figure 23) migrant parents in the PRD prefer jobs that allow more time for childcare and provide educational assistance, while those in Chongqing prioritized flexible working hours, allowing to commute between work and home (since they were generally closer to their

Figure 22: Issues considered in migrant workers' choice of employment



hometowns) to provide care for their children.

#### 4.2 The impact of parenthood on work stability

Parents of migrant children tend to make reliable workers due to stability of their family lives. Interviews of factory managers also confirmed that these parents are usually more reliable than other workers.

On the other hand, parents of left-behind children, might ask for leave more often (Figure 24), usually due to parenting and family related reasons. Just over half of migrant workers in the PRD go home once a year, with parents of migrant-children going least frequently. In Chongqing workers tend to go home more often, with roughly 80% visiting home at least once a year, and often for less pressing reasons.

“Some 90% of our migrant workers come from nearby areas in Chongqing and Sichuan Province”, says one factory manager. “It’s really easy for them to go home; they don’t have to wait for the mass-migration around Spring Festival. But the challenge with this is stopping them from going back for

Figure 23: Issues considered in migrant workers' choice of employment



minor reasons such as birthdays or neighbors’ wedding, which forces you to put people on overtime if an urgent order comes up. But I still think the positives [of being close to home] outweigh the negatives”.

Figure 24: Reasons for migrant workers to return home

Main reason for migrant workers to return home	Migrant parents with left-behind children	Migrant parents having children with them	Young migrant workers
See family on major holidays	75%	70%	79%
Parents' sickness	45%	37%	26%
Weddings and funerals of family members	34%	39%	35%
Schooling difficulties linked to household registration	24%	15%	1%
Children's education	17%	6%	0%
Requests from family members to return	30%	29%	37%
Processing documentation tied to household registration	27%	41%	30%

## 5. Young workers and their expectations on parenthood

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When selecting employers, young workers mostly focused on career development, and few considered potential family well-being. However more than 70% felt they would make good parents in the future.

This study found that young migrant workers had higher awareness about the importance of children's need for nurturing love and care, healthy emotional development, and ability to develop good social skills. Moreover, almost all young workers thought that children should be raised by their parents, in order to help them cultivate healthy values (72%), support their comprehensive development (75%), and help their children's social integration (49%).

Young workers' concerns about becoming future parents are similar to those of migrant workers who already have children. Their main fears are:

- job insecurity and lack of a stable environment for children (80%)
- lack of appropriate guardians and parenting experience (44%)
- the high cost of upbringing (43%)

*"If I have children, I will take them with me, because I have experienced that kind of unhappiness," says Qin Huan, 16, a young worker with many years of experience as a left-behind child. "Although I haven't thought about how to solve the difficulties involved, I will take them with me. I have friends and I will discuss this with them. They won't leave their children at home either; we will take them with us and be part of their education."*

Interviews such as the one above show the influence of past experience on the new generation of migrant workers. Many of the young workers have experienced being migrant and left-behind children, and they are keenly aware of the pain caused by separation. When comparing the economic gains from migration, with the alienation and emotional hurt involved, majority care

more about being good parents in the future. As such, it is likely that when the younger generation is faced with a conflict between raising children and work, they will put the well-being of children first.

## 6. Migrant workers' expectations for support

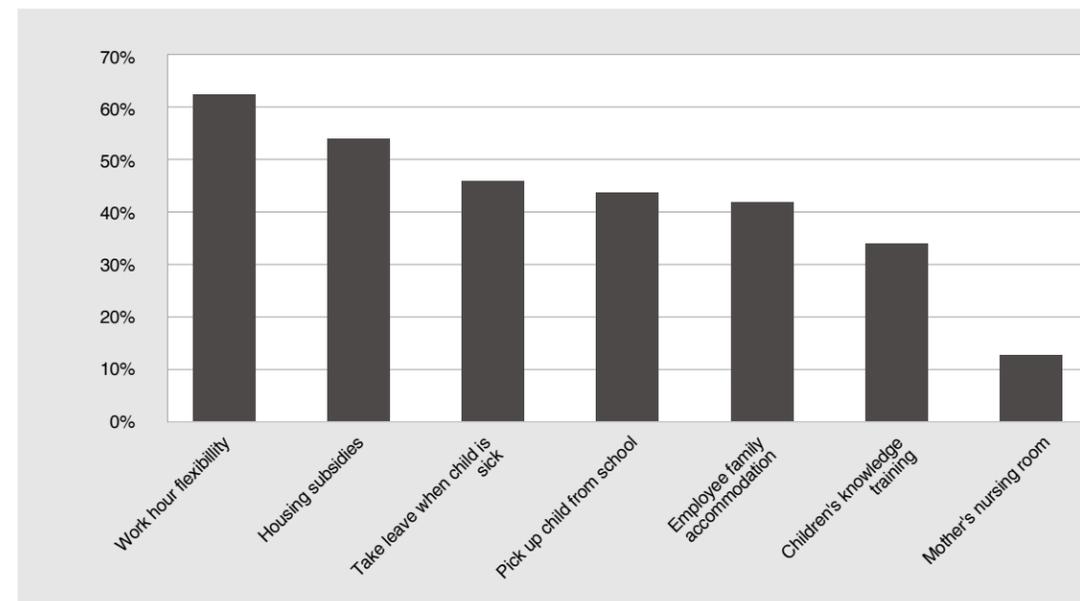
### 6.1 Business support

The main expectations for help included easier access to schools (72%), more flexible working hours (64%) and the provision of housing subsidies (54%). Flexible work arrangement was particularly important on the day-to-day basis to allow for picking up children from school and dealing with sickness and emergency. Company-based kindergartens and tutoring centers were frequently mentioned as a potential way to solve some of these problems.

While the companies did provide some assistance with flexible work schedules, parental training and provision of family housing, only 23% of migrant workers surveyed felt supported by the companies in their role as parents.

At the same time, migrant workers had a limited understanding of the responsibilities of business in the development of children, which pointed to a need for stronger engagement and awareness building. Most said they

Figure 25: Company assistance for employees with children



knew that child labor, as well as putting children in contract with work-related hazards, were forbidden. However, nearly a quarter of migrant workers marked "unsure" when asked what they knew about CSR and children's rights.

### 6.2 Government support

At present very few migrant workers think that government has provided them with relevant assistance, in particular with access to affordable housing or equal-opportunity education. This was especially the case in terms of migrant children having to return to their hometown to attend high-school and sit for the national college entrance examinations. More than half of all workers interviewed said that they had also hoped for improved social security benefits.

Chongqing offers a few innovative policy solutions, including provision of inexpensive public housing, for which the workers in a specific income bracket can qualify. New industrial parks in the area also offer good-quality worker dormitories and accommodation reserved for families.

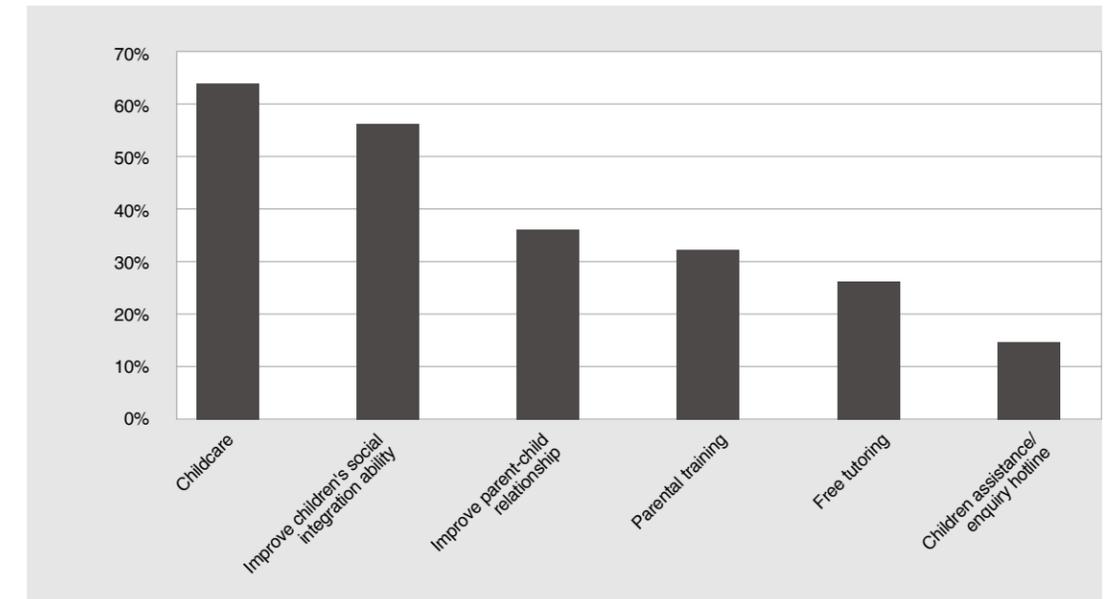
### 6.3 NGO support

Low-cost but safe and reliable public welfare services, including services helping improve children's social integration abilities, and their relationships with parents were at the top of possible NGO assistance mentioned by the workers. However, the study found that overall awareness of NGO work was low, and that at present only 7% of migrant workers or their close acquaintances have received help from social organizations.

Figure 26: Migrant workers' expectations of government assistance

Area	Government assistance that migrant workers hope to receive	Left-behind children parents	Migrant children parents	Young workers	Parents with left-behind children and migrant children
PRD	Low-rent family housing	42%	28%	31%	38%
	Child-development parental training	19%	12%	28%	5%
	Low-cost childcare	24%	16%	20%	19%
	Provide free services such as caretaking, tutoring, summer camps, family activities	37%	26%	43%	21%
	Resolve schooling problems	50%	62%	51%	55%
	College entrance exams are allowed away from hometown	32%	56%	27%	52%
	Migrant children and children of local residents enjoy same social benefits	50%	65%	67%	60%
Chongqing	Low-rent family housing	38%	31%	46%	64%
	Child-development parental training	16%	13%	24%	27%
	Low-cost childcare	24%	34%	19%	27%
	Provide free services such as caretaking, tutoring, summer camps, family activities	24%	23%	42%	46%
	Resolve schooling problems	49%	52%	40%	18%
	College entrance exams are allowed away from hometown	24%	43%	25%	18%
	Migrant children and children of local residents enjoy same social benefits	49%	62%	62%	46%

Figure 27: Areas where NGOs can provide support



## 7. CSR and existing support for migrant worker parents

### 7.1 Multinational companies, suppliers and business management are yet to embrace CSR and children's rights

CSR and children's rights are still concepts that are at an early stage in China's business environment, whether in the traditional garment industry or in the high-end electronic products manufacturing.

Businesses and management departments surveyed for this report said they perceived CSR mainly in terms of providing reasonable salaries, welfare benefits, and a safe working environment. However, some management representatives also mentioned the importance of local community and vulnerable groups, including the workers' children.

*"There is no doubt that if workers' working environment is improved, their children's lives are also indirectly improved."*

—Quality control manager

*"It might seem that children have nothing to do with business, but this is actually not the case. Children will consume business products and take jobs as employees, when they grow up."*

—HR manager

*"I figure that all social responsibility involves people, so people should be at the core – their working hours, salaries, health care and safety, as well as demands for improvements to their working and living environments."*

—Business representative

At the same, when it came to actually responding to the needs of migrant parents, most CSR programs presented were insufficient.

- Company CSR blueprints discussed did not include specific support strategies for the children of migrant workers, and no in-depth, systematic consideration was given to their needs. When management representatives were asked about the number of staff who were married or had children, most could provide only limited or no data.
- Interviewees also stated that they had not given a lot of thought to the problems of migrant workers' children, but felt that the challenges might include lack of time for appropriate care, economic pressures related to schooling, family communication breakdowns, as well as child safety. They said it was difficult to cite specific examples due to lack of data, but agreed that such problems would "certainly affect" their business.

Compared to HR managers, the quality control and production managers are in a better position to understand the problems faced by migrant parents because their work brings them into frequent contact with the workers. However, because the majority of businesses interviewed failed to include the needs of migrant workers with children in their CSR planning, it remained difficult for HR and quality control managers to have a complete understanding of the situation.

When the CSR programs did include information about children in factory audits, it was due to legal requirements and mandated industry-standards. Some companies engaged in public welfare projects, but did not in turn engage their supply-chain factories. Meanwhile, future plans for helping employees with children were vague. The few examples cited included one-off activities aimed at the children of workers.

Because the needs of migrant-worker children, and the challenges related to parenting, have so far no place in the company CSR programs there is a significant lack of targeted, systematic, and long-term support strategies. Improved awareness of workers' family situation, and the related turnover and production efficiency could provide a good starting point for such strategies.

*"The more care businesses provide for children, the more loyal employees will be. It's beneficial to business development."*

—HR manager

## **7.2 Businesses have a limited level of knowledge about the relationship between CSR and the rights of children**

A number of brands and businesses participating in this study have good CSR records, and some are even leaders in their field, offering a range of quality staff services. Certain companies, for example, support women's health-training programs, which assist workers in learning about early childcare. Others work in tandem with their suppliers to establish community service centers that can provide support for migrant workers with accompanying children. Overall, initiatives of this kind are not without significance, but there continues to be a general lack of focus on the needs of migrant workers with children.

Large-scale enterprises tend to have more thorough CSR operations and place greater pressure on management to fully implement relevant policies and regulations, including activities focused on various categories of employees. However, as a rule, businesses engage in CSR largely in the interests of their corporate reputations, caring for the socially vulnerable, children with special needs, and the elderly (for example by visiting orphanages and nursing homes, and assisting students who live in isolated areas).

Meanwhile, the CSR activities of other companies are focused on issues related to the workplace, and activities aimed at improving the lives of their employees. The needs of migrant-workers and their children may or may not be an area of focus.

Small-scale businesses tend to carry out CSR activities in accordance with nationally mandated laws and regulations, auditing for factors that might put them in breach of the law, such as child labor, and providing nursing and maternity leave.

Overall, the CSR actions that are being undertaken for migrant workers and their children can be summarized as follows:

- Provision of designated breastfeeding areas: seven out of nine businesses surveyed had nursing rooms, and some companies also actively worked to create a comfortable environment and provide time necessary for breastfeeding.
- Provision of leave for employees with children: employees can seek leave when their children are ill. Small-scale businesses tend to have greater flexibility, and can generally provide leave for a month to two months, while larger companies will generally deduct time off from annual leave, with extensions available only under certain conditions.
- Provision of assistance for workers to return home: Most companies provide subsidies for workers to return home for Chinese New Year, with the amount ranging from CNY 200 to CNY 300 , providing the workers will return to their jobs.
- Provision of working time to make or receive emergency calls: employees with children frequently worry about not being able to react if their children have accidents while they are at work. Most companies allow employees to bring cell phones to the workplace, and the small number that do not, do so due to concerns over confidentiality and work efficiency. In such cases, most businesses provide public telephones, making it possible for workers to receive and make calls via factory-floor managers.
- Provision of family get-togethers and family 'open days': this includes inviting the staff family members to factory visits and events, birthday parties, and recreational activities. Other occasions for family get-togethers include summer camps designed with workers' children in mind.
- Family and parenting-related education: such seminars generally focus on maternal and children's health.

- Visiting the homes of “excellent staff”: visits of this kind involve business representatives going to the employee’s hometown, as a gesture of encouragement.
- Psychological and emotional counseling: such services generally include a 24-hour “care hotline.” Some businesses cooperate with NGOs and open an independent 24-hour hotline helping to deal with emotional crises, family relationship problems, issues related to children’s education, and any other areas in which staff might need personal support. Meanwhile, some companies establish specialized in-house counseling services, allowing employees to seek psychological counseling services.
- Assisting employees in accessing local public services: such services include the provision of information and often assistance in applying for schools and local household registration (*hukou*).
- Provision of accommodation for couples: when certain conditions are met – generally that both husband and wife are working in the same company – accommodation is made available to couples at below-market prices.
- Community hosting services: two companies participating in the survey have provided employees’ children with an after-school activity center, giving the parents peace of mind about their children’s whereabouts in the late afternoon hours. The project is run by a specialized social-work agency and co-funded by the local-government and company’s CSR budget.
- Onsite nurseries: three of the companies opened kindergartens at their supplier factories to resolve staffing and childcare issues in the workplace.
- Engaging in community child welfare projects: businesses with CSR programs aimed at migrant worker children largely concentrate on public projects, such as provision of educational courses, personal finance management and computer literacy lessons.

Despite the efforts listed above, awareness of available services among workers remains low, and some do not believe that any relevant services exist at all. However, companies can do much more to promote efficient support for working parents, including the necessary awareness building of the existing measures and fostering a sense of belonging in the workplace.

The key points of actions for companies to take, suggested by this study are as follows:

- **Improved CSR strategy and cooperation with the company suppliers in developing family-supportive policy:** At present there was little coordination between brand companies and their suppliers in responding to the needs of migrant families. Their situation is rarely taken into account during the design of sustainability and human resource policies and no relevant data is collected to support such efforts.
- **Improved access to information:** additional support can be provided to facilitate workers’ access to and understanding of policies and information regarding local hukou registration, education, social insurance and available community services.
- **Flexible work-hours and family-related leave:** improved work-time arrangements allowing workers to respond to their children’s educational and other basic needs have a proven, positive impact on workers’ motivation, efficiency and stability. A possibility of family-related leave during low production cycles should also be taken into consideration.
- **Enhanced cooperation with NGOs and social work organizations:** specialized NGO assistance can provide effective support towards workers’ community integration, parenting education and free childcare. However, less than 10% of workers interviewed for this research said they have received NGO-related assistance.

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## Appendix 1: In their own words

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### Case 1: Schooling for children is still a problem

*Liu Qiang, 38 years old, parent of three children*

Whether the children can go to school will determine whether Liu Qiang's family can be together in the future. Many working families face a similar dilemma: children's schooling is always the stumbling block for migrant workers and their families when they move away from home.

Liu Qiang, aged 38, a native of Sichuan, has been working away from home for over 20 years. He has worked in many jobs in the past: spray-painting, cooking, building renovations – and he has learned to drive.

Liu has three children – two daughters and a son, all born in Zhuhai, the Macao border-town in Guangdong Province. His eldest daughter is nine years old, and she will enter fifth grade in the second half of 2013. His second daughter is six years old, and she is about to enter first grade, while his four-year-old son is the youngest. Liu has worked for more than a decade in Zhuhai, and the family lives in simple housing at the work premises. They have often faced pressures to move, but for 10 years now the site owners have not charged them for rent and utilities, which is a significant saving for the family.

Liu's wife works in a Zhuhai factory. As soon as the children were born, Liu's parents came to Zhuhai from their hometown to help take care of their grandchildren. The elders usually collect scrap waste and sell it to help support the family. Overall, the family has an annual income of around CNY60-70,000. For example, last year, Liu worked in construction and renovation, earning a monthly salary of CNY4,000, his wife earned CNY\$2,000 a month, and the grandparents provided some supplemental income.

But over the course of a year, the family's expenses are extensive: three

children's schooling, daily living expenses, visiting relatives – and outgoings are even greater if a family member gets ill.

"My parents are getting on in years, and coupled with a life of hard work, it's inevitably there will be some illnesses," says Liu. "My youngest daughter and son's health are also not very good. Nowadays, if you go to the hospital, it can easily cost several hundred or CNY1,000. If the illness is serious, and requires hospitalization, then you can easily spend thousands of dollars."

Liu calculates that over the past two years, treatments for his father and his son have racked up more than CNY10,000 in hospital bills. Nevertheless, the family is still together.

As the children grow up, their schooling has become a major problem. The eldest daughter's schooling in Zhuhai has been made possible through connections and costs CNY2,000, along with a payment of CNY1,000 to the school. Her enrollment problems are basically resolved. The younger daughter and son both want to go to the same school, but that will be difficult. It is no longer possible to bypass restrictions through connections. Rather, an online lottery system combines with test scores and other conditions, such as children's place of birth and household registration, parents' marriage certificate, and residence permits. In addition, there are quota restrictions.

The industrial area where the family lives has private primary schools, but the charges are very high, with one year costing nearly CNY10,000. For Liu's family, this is overwhelming, and he says he and his family will take the children back home to go school after the summer vacation.

"If they go to school back home in Sichuan Province in the second half of the year, it will reduce a lot of expenses, but the kids will not have anyone to take care of them," he says. "Teaching standards are also not as good as here in Zhuhai, and I'm afraid of the impact on the children's future. Also, if we are not with the kids, even if the grandparents are there to take care of them, we are afraid we'll drift apart."

Meanwhile, he says, if he and his wife move back home with the children, there is a shortage of employment and their incomes would drop – and besides the eldest daughter is doing well at school in Zhuhai.

Liu's family home in Sichuan is very old and in a state of disrepair because the couple have lived in Zhuhai for many years, and have only gone back a few times.

"Our youngest daughter and son do not know what their hometown is like, and only have vague impressions," says Liu. "If we really did take the children back home, they will need time to adapt to the home environment, which will also affect their education. We don't know what to do."

The family, in other words, has to face some tough choices to make.

Liu looks on the bright side, saying that, while grades are impacted by learning environment, it's still up to the children to make their own efforts, "No matter where they study, we need to cultivate children's ability to learn," he says, adding: "The school at our hometown has also produced many university students; if a child knows the importance of studying, they will shine anywhere."

When asked about responsibilities of business for the development of employees' children, Liu and his wife said they felt that the possibility of such a thing happening was remote. According to Liu, NGOs such as the Zhuhai CCCF in the industrial park where they work have given them a lot of help, including childcare, tutoring, and parent-child activities, "Our family really needs this help," says Liu.

[Interview Notes] A month after the above interview, Liu and his family decided to return home. "Liu Xin [his second daughter] cannot enroll in first grade in Zhuhai. She cannot attend a regular school. I feel that this place does not seem to accommodate outsiders, so we had to return home. We went away to work in the hopes of earning a little more money, for the [children's] future! However, the current situation has changed our thinking."

## **Case 2: One family in three places feels bad**

*Ou Haisheng, 42 years old, parent of two children*

Ou Haisheng has two daughters. The eldest is 16 and is in the hometown studying at junior high, and the youngest, 11, is in fifth grade with the family in Zhuhai. Ou's life revolves around his children and his family.

Ou's hometown is in a small village in Guangzhou Province. After graduating from elementary school, he left to work at construction sites, factories, the railways, and later in a kitchenware factory, where he learned to work the lathe, enabling him to do his current job as a lathe mechanic. Ou and his wife work in Zhuhai.

"Before we worked in order to eat better, but now we work in order to put the girls through school and feed them," says Ou. "If we don't work, we can only eat, and have no spending money because there's nowhere to sell farming produce."

The husband and wife's annual income is around CNY50,000, but there is little left after overheads are taken into account. Also, because they cannot take care of the grandparents at home when they get sick, there are sometimes family conflicts.

"In the early years, when I use to call home, my dad would tell me a lot of things in detail, but the phone bill was expensive, so I would tell him to just tell me the major points, just a summary, and he would get angry and hang up, which would make me feel bad."

Working away from home affects the elderly and the children. "If the kids are not with us, there's no one to take care of them, and this has an impact on a lot of things: our relationship becomes distant, we can't manage issues at home when we are away, and after a long time away the home situation becomes unclear," says Ou. "The children just read and watch TV with their grandparents, they don't socialize with others, and the old people seldom communicate with the children. They never ask the children to do anything. If the kids listen to

them, that's great, but if they don't then that's that. Boys are particularly difficult to manage. A neighbor's child who has been living with his grandmother since his parents have left to seek work, told her, 'I'll knife you if you're too strict.' We are concerned about our limited communication with the kids."

In 2010, Ou's eldest daughter entered junior high, which was relatively far away from home. That combined with the poor quality of teaching made Ou and his wife decide to have the two girls live with them in Zhuhai. But the eldest daughter's tuition fees were CNY3,200 per semester (a private secondary school), while the younger daughter's primary school (a public primary school) required a one-time payment of CNY2500 to cover tuition from Grade 2 to Grade 6, with subsequent tuition fees of CNY2-300 per month.

"Although policy states that schooling costs for migrant children and local children should be the same, local schoolchildren do not have to pay so much," says Ou. "This year the elder daughter should go on to senior high, but we're concerned about her not passing the high-school admission test in Zhuhai. In our hometown, a family of only girls receives additional points, so we're letting the older daughter study back at home, but the economic pressure is big.

In order to make more money, a relative introduced Ou Haisheng to work in a company in Hebei Province, in the north of the PRC, for CNY6,000 per month. While it was a long way from home, he still chose to go. Unfortunately, he only received CNY2,800 per month in hand. His family in Zhuhai begged him to return. After much thought, Ou returned to Zhuhai, but that meant he made very little money in the first half of the year.

"In work life, you will encounter some problems regardless of whether children are around, but if children are around, you need to work and take care of the kids," says Ou. "After work, we have to cook, and also remind the child to do this and that. It's very tiring. We don't work at the same factory. If we did, at could at least swap shifts."

Meanwhile, there are other concerns.

"Going home for Spring Festival [Chinese New Year], we heard our daughter's classmates say that she goes to internet cafes ... I'm worried she will become addicted. Being so far away, if that happens, we don't know what to do, so after the summer vacation we brought her back here."

For, Ou, having the family together again at least means they can communicate and he and his wife can take care of the children.

"When our older daughter is studying in my hometown, and my parents are in the countryside, and we are here in Zhuhai – one family in three places, it feels bad. When the children are at home, no matter how painful or tiring it is, just chatting with them makes life a little easier. When the children are not around, I only think about problems at the factory."

For the future, Ou says the only real option is to return home. We won't have enough money to buy a house in the city. We hope the children will get a chance to develop, and I hope they can stay near the hometown, and we can take care of each other. "They can care for us when we get old."

### **Case 3: I want to be part of your life**

*A-ying, 33 years old, parent of two children*

A-ying comes from Hunan Province. Unsatisfactory junior high-school results coupled with the poor economy in her home province, led her to seek work opportunities in the city. In the past 18 years, she has seldom gone home. Her eldest child is 10, and her youngest is six. In order to have a better living environment, her and husband borrowed a lot of money when they got married and moved from the countryside. Now the in-laws take care of the children in their hometown.

Her children present A-ying with a dilemma. If she stays with them, she can't be with her husband, but if stays with her husband, then she can't be with

the children and look after them. This dilemma has plagued A-ying with guilt, particularly with the older child.

"The older child was often sick when he was one, and I had to work, and the medical costs in the city were expensive, so my only option was to send him back home," says A-ying.

Later, even though her economic conditions had improved enough to allow her son to study at a city school, she worried that it was difficult for non-local residents to progress to junior high school, and along with the language differences and the fact that her eldest was an introverted child, she decided it was better to let the child study in the hometown. A-ying spent only very short periods with her children – a month during the summer vacation, 10 days during Spring Festival.

"The greatest difficulty I have with the older child is that I can't be part of his life," she says with a look of visible sadness. "Every time I call, he is unwilling to pick up, and even if he picks up he isn't willing to say anything. I ask him questions, but he doesn't seem to want to answer, even though he is certainly complaining about his parents not looking after him."

A-ying has spent summer vacations with her son, helping him with homework. She found he had psychological conflicts, preferring to write down issues that were buried, but unwilling to answer her questions. In her view, the problem is lack of parental care.

"The reason he dislikes us is because he blames us for not taking care of him, because he did not get proper care. Living together would have helped make our relationship more affectionate," A-ying says.

"I wanted to go back and look after the children when they were in junior high school, but I don't have a diploma and I couldn't find a good job, and that would mean my husband has to work hard by himself."

A-ying is anxious, being far away from home but she needs to be attentive at work and try to stay calm. She says her son's behavior problems are her fault. The people working around her do not know what she is going through.

"A good parent needs to always take care of their children ... raising a child is a parent's responsibility, after all, and parental care plays an essential role in the child's growth," she says.

Like many migrant workers, A-ying and her husband save a lot, and their major overhead is sending money to their children. But A-ying remains concerned about their relations. "My ideal is that our children treat us as friends, and use their needs and feelings. I want to tell them that Mom and Dad love you."

When it comes to help for families with left-behind children, A Ying said, she hopes the factory can help solve some of her children's education difficulties. She says she would welcome free summer camps, paid leave to look after her children, and the establishment of education funds, and she says she also hopes the government can help solve schooling difficulties, and that welfare organizations can give children more positive guidance.

#### **Case 4: No matter how difficult, children should be close at hand**

*Jiang Shuilian, 38 years old, parent of two children*

Jiang Shuilian felt bad for leaving her eldest son back at home. No matter what the difficulties, she says she thinks children should be brought up around their parents.

Jiang started to work when she was 17. She changed jobs a few times before she had children. Later, she worked for 10 years at a knitting factory, because she needed a stable income after having a child. Today, the eldest son is 18, while the younger son is five.

Jiang feels down when the subject of children is brought up.

“My eldest son came to live and study with us when he was six, and he studied here until high school before returning home because he was unable to take the college entrance examination in Zhuhai,” says Jiang.

She sobs as she recalls the scene: “He’s psychologically conflicted; he feels hatred towards his parents. I feel bad. He came to Zhuhai when he was six, but he didn’t want to study here; he wanted to go back home. When I asked him why, he said he wouldn’t have to do as much homework at home, and wouldn’t get told off. It took him three months to adapt to the environment here.”

Jiang’s husband helps to transfer waste at several factories. Most of the couple’s income goes to their children’s schooling. After working for nearly 20 years, she is grateful her home economic conditions have improved, but family life still has its trials.

“When our son was in the last year of junior high, that was the worst, because he was playing computer games,” she says. “I caught him in internet cafes and I told him if he continued I wouldn’t let him go to school, wouldn’t give him clothes to wear, or food to eat. My husband got very angry and spanked him with a pair of slippers. He immediately took my husband’s mobile and called the police hotline. But the police know slippers are nothing, and they didn’t come.”

She says the boy later admitted that he was wrong, which made her feel more sorry for him.

Today, he is about to take the college entrance exams, and her youngest son is with her and her husband. The couple has rented a place to live for CNY300 a month,

“I don’t care how well we live. As long as the children get to eat well, we adults can eat less,” she says.

Jiang puts her youngest in a nursery in the morning, and their grandparents pick him up in the afternoon. “Although every day is a day of hard work, there are still chores to do such as washing clothes, and taking care of the children’s homework, until as late as 10 p.m. It’s beautiful to be with the children,” says Jiang, despite how hard her life is.

“I’m not a good mother, and I don’t have much time to take care of the children,” she says, but she also describes not being able to be together with her children as “a kind of torture,” and says it impacts her both in terms of her work and psychologically.

Of her time in the knitting factory, she recalls, “You need to count the number of revolutions of the wheel when making sweaters in the factory, but thinking about my boy would make me lose my train of thought,” she says. “I’d try to tell myself that other kids go through the same thing, try to control my emotions. I’d want to go home to have a look, and make sure he was OK, but I also wanted to make more money.”

Jiang says does not have overly high expectations of her children, and only hopes that they can graduate from university and find jobs. Her biggest wish is to have stable work and make enough money for her two children to attend school. If she could, she says, she would like to tell them, “Grow up happy and study hard.”

### **Case 5: I want to see my daughter grow up**

*A-fen, 40 years old, parent of two children*

A-fen has worked away from home and worried about her daughter for so many years, she decided to move back and work, even if it meant less income.

A-fen comes from Chongqing, and she currently works in a factory near her hometown of Fengdu County. She is a mother of two children, and the eldest

daughter is 19 and attending her first year of university, while her second daughter is 10, in the fourth grade of primary school. She chose her latest job to be “close to my child,” because she now believes that children are always biggest parents’ biggest concern.

In 1993, at the age of 20, A-fen and her husband went to work in Fuzhou, Fujian Province. They were there for less than six months. In 1994, A-fen’s daughter was born, and at first she stayed home to look after her. But, within a few months she had to give her daughter to the in-laws, and return to working life – this time in the PRD. She worried so much she lasted only half a year before returning home again. She continued to leave and look for work, but it always involved being far from home, and A-fen worried so much about her daughter that she generally only lasted half a year.

In 1998, A Fen and her husband – he works at a construction site – had saved enough to build a small house in their hometown. When her father died, and with her mother-in-law getting on, A-fen and husband decided to move back and find work. That way, she could take care of her daughter, as well as her mother-in-law. A-fen’s husband farmed at home, keeping a few pigs, and A-fen worked in Chongqing city, which was just several hours away, allowing her to go home to see her child and her mother-in-law whenever she had time off. It is an arrangement that has worked now for more than seven years. She has worked in garment, shoe, and handbag factories, making up to CNY2,000 a month, and working as much as 10 hours a day.

A-fen used to bring her daughters to her workplace in Chongqing to play, and to understand what their mother does. She urges her girls to study hard, because she knows only education can better their lives. Meanwhile, the eldest daughter helps bring up the younger, discouraging her from eating unnecessary snacks, saying, “You’ll eat up all mother’s hard earned money. The eldest daughter teaches the younger daughter these days. When A-fen calls, the girls tell her not to work too hard, and say they will help by making their own money, which makes her happy.

“My eldest daughter is studying in Wuhan, at the Zhongnan University of Economics’ School of Accounting Professionals,” says a proud A-fen. “She often receives scholarships that almost cover her cost of living. Her grades are good. Once she wrote an essay called “Mother’s Love,” which won a prize. All children need parental love, but education is important too. If children don’t have a good education, they won’t earn a good living.”

Today A-fen works in a factory just one hour from home. She come comes home to visit her daughter on the weekends or whenever she does not have to work overtime. The next day she goes back to work. A-fen’s husband still farms at home, and if pork prices are good, he can earn CNY20-30,000 a year. The younger daughter studies in the town’s primary school, and she will be able to live with here parents in their new house while she attends junior high, giving the family more opportunities to be together.

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Pseudonyms have been used.

## Appendix 2:Voices of left-behind children

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### Case 1: I want to know how my dad's doing

*Xiaohang, 12 years old*

Xiaohang's mother died of cancer when he was eight, and his father makes a living selling flowers in Guangzhou. The boy currently lives with his aunt in the family hometown.

"My mum left me in 2009 when she died of cancer. I was eight then. My older sister works in Yongchuan. She's married and has a three-year-old child.

"I came back here to our hometown when I was in primary school. The last time I saw dad was on National Day in 2012. That's over six months ago. I went to meet him at the airport in Chongqing, I was really happy to see him, and dad was really happy too, but I can't remember what we talked about.

"I don't get in touch with my dad myself. Every other week or so he calls. He asks me how my grades are in school. He asks what I'm having any problems in my Chinese classes and he helps me. For example, if I have a problem with reading something, dad will tell me how to sort it out. He also tells me I should do some stuff around the house to help my aunt. Dad comes home once every other year, usually during the summer holidays, because then he can spend more time hanging out with me.

"Dad's working in Guangzhou. Since I came back home when I was in primary school I've been there twice – once in 2008 and once in 2010 – and I stayed for over a month. I once went to see my dad when he was at work. It was really buzzing with activity and sometimes I helped out. My dad took me out sometimes, but I'm not really sure where to; I can't really remember. He leaves at 6 or 7am and gets back at 7pm. Sometimes I'd go with him, and other times I'd stay at home by myself doing some homework or just chilling out. I make my own food.

"When something makes me unhappy I just keep it to myself, I don't find someone to talk to about it. I've thought about talking to dad or to my aunt, but in the end I gave up on that idea. Once I came across an injured bird. I fed it insects, and in the end it flew away. I didn't tell my aunt about it because she doesn't agree with me doing something like that. I didn't tell dad either, but my friends all know about it.

"When I do talk to dad, I want him to talk about what he's up to over there. I want to know how he's doing, if he's okay, but I've never asked him because I don't think he wants to talk about it. Aside from stuff to do with school I don't know what to talk to dad about. I think he's only interested in how my studies are going. Maybe next time I'll try asking him about something else, and tell him what I'm thinking.

"During holidays and festivals, I miss my dad. I don't know why he has to work in Guangzhou. I've never asked him. My aunt cares about me. When we're eating, she gives me the best bits, and the bits that aren't so tasty she keeps for herself to eat. I sometimes pick up the tasty bits and give them to her. I've lived with her for about four years. The most important thing here, where my aunt lives, is doing farm work. My dad does migrant work, and it's the only way to take care of your family. When I'm not at school, I sometimes go and help my aunt with the farming, picking weeds and planting seeds.

"I've never really thought about going over to live with my dad before. I don't have any friends over there, and I can't really speak the local dialect [Cantonese]. My dad's talked about getting me to go over to Guangzhou – he says it every time he calls. To begin with, I didn't want to go, but this year I want to go and spend some time over there. If I get on with the people, where he lives, I could live there. When I grow up, I'm going to go and live in a big city; the environment's better there. But I haven't thought about what I'll do when I grow up.

"What I think about most is how my mum was so good to me. From my second year to my fourth year in school she came back home to look after

me. During the time when mum was back here, to begin with her health was still okay, but then her illness came back. She went to stay in hospital. I was there with her in hospital while she was being treated. Dad didn't come back during that period. My mum really cared about me. Once when I had a toothache and I was in the hospital on a drip, my mum made congee for me to eat at home, and at nighttime she was at my bedside looking after me.

"When I was living with my mum, sometimes we'd chat about things that had happened in kindergarten. Kindergarten was when I was living with mum and dad. That was a really happy time. The happiest thing I remember was fishing with my sister and her friends.

"My greatest wish now is to live with my dad."

[A postscript from the interviewer]: Xiaohang is clearly torn between moving to a strange environment and wanting to be with own dad. Perhaps he doesn't even realize it himself. There is obviously a contradiction, which is clear when the boy describes having been to visit his father, while his father told us that he hadn't been. These contradictions are a struggle in the child's head. Should we understand this as the boy saying he wants to go? It is difficult to say. Perhaps he thought he should say the "right thing," or what he thought he was supposed to say. Perhaps as adults we will never really know what children like this are thinking.

### **Case 2: I talk to my toy bear when I feel down**

*Xiaoli, 12 years old*

Xiaoli was born in Zunyi in Guizhou Province. Her parents started out as street fruit vendors in Zunyi, but are now migrant workers in a factory in Chongqing. Xiaoli was sent home at eight months to her grandmother. Since she rarely has time to see her parents, she sometimes blames them for giving birth to her and not taking care of her. She even thinks she might not be their biological daughter.

"I was born in Zunyi, and my parents were street fruit vendors. Now they are

away from me. I would only share with them something I'm happy about; not anything negative.

"I'm not sure whether my parents miss me or not. I can't read their minds, and I haven't asked them about this. I grew up with my grandma. My mom didn't spend much time with me when I grew up, so I'm not very intimate with her. When talk to my parents on the phone, I usually don't initiate conversations; just answer their questions. Previously my parents talked about bringing me and my sister to Chongqing to live with them, but I don't want to, because I don't know what it would be like. However, if my grandma moves to Chongqing, I would love to move with her. I don't care much about where my parents work – Chongqing, or somewhere closer, it doesn't matter to me. Where they are is their own business – it should totally be their own decision. At this point, I don't have a preference about staying in the city or in the countryside, and I don't have any concrete career plans either."

"I don't like school breaks. Although I can go and see my parents during breaks, I couldn't hang out with my peers or simply go out for fun. Usually, when I go to the city, I spend every day with my parents during the summer vacation. But I don't feel much different during those periods.

"My sister was sent back home when she was maybe five, but I was sent back at a very young age. My grandma told me it was because I cried too much and it bothered my parents. When grandma was working on farm, she always brought me along. In my memories, grandma is the one that gave me the most care and love. When I was sick, my parents wouldn't come back to take me to hospital, they only mailed back some medications. Although I don't like going to the doctor and getting shots, I still feel it's necessary.

"I wish they could come home during the Spring Festival (Chinese New Year). Every year I have to go to Chongqing for that. I think when they say they can't make it home it's more of an excuse. I somehow feel like an unwanted burden in our family. I even think I might not be their biological daughter. I think the most important thing is a happy family. But even though some of

my friends value happiness, most just care about getting what they want or money.”

“My mom and dad only care about my school performance. I think they think have already fulfilled their duty for me. In my opinion, if one gives birth to a child then abandons her, and another woman adopts the kid and takes care of her, the kid would be more grateful to the stepmother than the birth one. I shared this opinion with my mother once, but she said I was wrong. They must have their own reasons for treating me like this. I don’t know what those reasons are, but I can accept the idea.

“Whenever I have a secret, I share it with grandma, if it is a small one, but I keep it to myself if it’s a bigger one. I wouldn’t talk to my sister about this kind of stuff, because she wouldn’t want to listen. When I was in sixth grade, I had a best friend, and I shared a lot of secret with her. I had another good friend when I was in fifth grade, but we didn’t hang out as much after we had a big fight. It’s easy for children to make it up after a fight, but hard for adults. I think I’m already half-adult. The fight happened more than one year ago, and I am still really mad, but I don’t show that. If I feel down, I share with my toy bear. I can’t remember when I got it.”

[A postscript from the interviewer]: Xiaoli seemed like an adult sitting in front of me. She could understand that life is hard for her own parents, but she still couldn’t accept that they left her back at home, alone. This is because she is still a child, and she needs intimacy with her parents. However, her avoidance, her attitude of “I don’t care” only gives the impression that she actually does need her parents. She likely really wants to be able to live with them, like her older sister.

### **Case 3: I forgot what my father looks like**

*Chen Guishan, 15 years old*

Chen Guishan is in the second year of junior middle school. He is from Chongqing, Changshou. His parents divorced when he was very young. His

mother is paralyzed due to a car accident, and his father works in Guizhou Province. Only Chen, his younger brother and grandmother, live in the hometown. His grandfather passed away long time ago. Chen’s mother came from Guizhou Province.

“Since I can remember, my father has worked away from home. I’ve asked what kind of job he does, but he told me to just concentrate on my studies. I don’t care what my father says to me and I don’t want to know what job he’s doing. He never tells me anything. I contact him by phone. Sometimes I call him when I’m sick. Once when I told my father I was sick, he came back the second day. I’d forgotten what my father looked like when he came last time. He comes back once or twice a year, but sometimes he doesn’t come back for the whole year. I don’t have any feelings about this. To me, tomorrow, today and yesterday are the same. I don’t want to live with my father. I’m used to living alone, and I don’t miss my father because I am not familiar with him.

“Since I was born, I have been to Guizhou less than five times. I remember once I went to Guizhou with my father to visit my grandfather. That time my mother was with us. After their divorce, when I was about five or six, my mother was paralyzed in a car accident. I don’t have any special memories about my parents. They seldom played with me.

“I only have one good friend in school. I might tell my classmates about my worries, but not everything. I don’t tell my father. Once he asked me and I told him, but his reaction hurt me. Now I only want to finish my education. I don’t like study because there is always a lot of homework. I feel alone and often sit by myself in school.

“When I was young, I lived in my grandmother’s house, but I haven’t been there for about three years. My grandmother is the only one who cares about me. My grandfather died long time ago. I don’t have a good relationship with my brother. I usually watch TV at home, but it’s boring. Bad things happen to me and give me a lot of pressure. I don’t have anything to say to my family.”

[A postscript from the interviewer]: The Chen family's yard has been locked up for a long time. Chen's grandmother told us there are no young people in the village because they are all working as migrants. Chen's father seldom comes home. Chen has many complains about his parents' divorce, the car accident that happened to his mother, and his father's absence. He doesn't talk to his friends about his family, but he told us many stories. Perhaps that was because we were outsiders who probably wouldn't come back.

#### **Case 4: I will take my children with me**

*Huan Qin, 16 years old*

Huan Qin is a high school second-year student. She was sent back to the hometown to live with her grandparents at the age of six. Because the older generation favors boys over girls, Huan feels wronged. She usually talks about her future with her friends. She has decided, no matter how difficult life is, she will take her children to live with her.

"My grandparents farm in our hometown. They don't need the money, but they want to work.

"My brother and I live at the school, and only come home during the weekends. It's a holiday today and my grandfather took my brother home. He didn't ask me. I'm unhappy about it because I want to go home as well.

"I don't know why my parents work in Kunming. They work on construction sites. I have been there once and I know they really work hard.

"I was living with my maternal grandmother when I was one or two. Then my mother gave birth to my younger brother and sent me to kindergarten. When I was in first grade and my brother was in kindergarten, they sent me back to my hometown. Since then, I've lived with my grandfather. I go to school by myself. No one takes care of me.

"My grandmother [maternal] gave me the most attention. She didn't want me

to do chores. But when I lived with the grandmother [paternal], they shouted at me when they were in a bad mood. I cooked every day and my brother tended the kitchen fire. My grandparents [paternal] never cook. My brother has similar experiences as me, but I think the grandparents like him more because he is a boy.

"My parents never want to take me to Kunming, because their work is unstable, and the education system and language are different. They are too busy every day to talk to me. I have classmates who live with their parents, and they sometimes argue with their parents. I still envy them a lot. When I was young, I expected my parents to come back every day and called them again and again. I always expected the good food and new clothes my parents would bring with them. In summer, my parents usually send back some presents. When I was in the fifth grade, they bought me a pair of pretty shoes! But the shoes were too small for me. Since I've grown up, my parents have stopped buying me new clothes.

"I have peers just like me. The most important time of the year is the reunion during the Spring Festival. I feel so happy on that day.

"When I graduated from middle school, my grades were not good enough to go to a good high school, but I still wanted to go. I asked many friends and my parents, and they told me to decide for myself. I didn't know what to do, and hoped my parents could help me make a decision. The school I'm attending now is not very good, and the students don't study.

"Before, I didn't want to be shouted at by my grandparents, so I played in my classmates' home. But then both my parents and my grandfather shouted at me. Sometime my grandfather comes to school and shouts at me in front of my classmates. I feel sad about it. If my parents were here, the situation would be much better.

"I cry in my room when I miss my parents, or when my grandparents shout at me. I don't know if my parents miss me and my brother. Maybe they don't

have time. My parents said they will come back when they are too old to work. Now I've got used to it.

"I guess I will work in a city when I grow up, but I will take my children to live with me because I know how unhappy it is to be left here. I talked about this with friends. I'm going to teach my children many skills. I'm good at dancing, but my parents never gave me a chance to go to any special interest classes. I like piano but I don't know how to play. I am in charge of all the art activities in my class.

"I don't have a dream. I hope my parents stay healthy."

[A postscript from the interviewer]: She was at home alone when we met her. She had only spent very limited time living with her mother. She doesn't like her grandparents, but she has learned to understand and be tolerant. She is very mature because she has experienced the pain of separation. She insisted that she would never let her children go through the same things. It was possible to sense her endurance when talking with her. It is worrying to wonder what would happen to her if she were not as strong as she is now.

### **Case 5: Dad, I love you**

*Wang Yuan, 12 years old*

Wang Yuan is in the fifth grade. His father works in Chongqing. His parents could not get legally married because couldn't get the blessings of both families. His grandparents (maternal) did not approve of their marriage. As a result, Wang Yuan was born out of wedlock. When he was four, her parents called his mother back to her hometown because her mother was sick. From then on, she never came back, although the boy's grandmother (paternal) wants him occasionally.

"I'm in fifth grade, and I'm the only child. My mom left when I was young, and I don't know where she is and what she does now. My dad is working in Chongqing, and he comes back and sees me every three or four months.

Every time he comes back, we're both pretty happy, although he usually doesn't talk a lot. For example, when he came back last time, I said to him 'Hi dad! You're back!' He replied, 'Yep.' And then, without saying anything else, we just watched TV together. The last time was in March, and since then until now – June – we have only spoken on the phone once, and he asked how I was doing at school.

"My grandma loves and cares about me the most. I go to school in my county every Monday and come back home every Friday. Every weekend when I'm back, grandma always prepares a lot of delicious food for me. My grandpa also loves me a lot. He helps me with difficulties in homework. When dad calls, he asks about school, and I would ask about his work. He always says it's fine. I don't really know if he has regular weekends, or whether he has any difficulties in the workplace. However, I don't dare to ask those questions on the phone. In the past, I've tried questions like, "How's your work dad; do you get breaks?" But he doesn't want to talk about it, and just tells me to focus on my studies. I miss my father a lot – perhaps three or four times a day. Once I told him so. I said over the phone: 'Dad, I miss you so much, please come back earlier.' He seemed really surprised, and he said, 'I'll come back after finishing work'. And then I said, 'Fine.'

Every time I miss my father, I tend to become more considerate to my grandparents. I help them to do things. When I tell my father this on the phone, he's always happy. My father is the closest person to me in the world. I want to live with him. But I don't have any friends in Chongqing. So it is a hard choice for me to move. But he can't move back either, because there are no job opportunities for him. I wish he worked closer so we could live together, and I could also play with my friends here. I haven't shared this thought with my father, because I don't want to put an extra burden on him when he is already working long hours. This is a really tough situation. If one day dad asks me to move to Chongqing, I think I would, even if it meant leaving my friends behind. I desperately want to live with him.

"I dream about becoming a chef, and I want to cook for my dad, because he

loves me a lot. Every time he comes back, he buys me a lot of presents. I want to work in Chongqing in the future, because I want to be reunited with my father. My biggest wish now is to spend every day with him. I want to tell my dad, 'Dad I love you! I really want to be with you a lot.' I haven't said this to him in the past.

But if I tell him this, it could disturb his already tough life. I feel that he misses me as well, and when I asked him in the past, he said, 'Of course I miss you.' I felt very happy hearing this, but I didn't follow up on it. I don't always ask him whether he misses me or not. I don't know what he does when he misses me, but I guess he would call. So every time he calls, I guess he must be calling because he misses me. Our regular phone calls last for three or four minutes. If I want to speak longer, I tell him about how great school is going to make him happy. I ask if work is good in Chongqing, and he says he's happy, working there to support my education. I have made plans about going to be with him in the future, and I don't mind if this means I will earn less money. I want to ask his opinion about this plan, but I haven't done that yet. I guess I could do it during the school break."

[A postscript from the interviewer]: I interviewed eight children, six of them from single-parent families. Reasons vary from the passing away of one parent, to divorce, to examples such as Wangyuan, who was abandoned by his mother. This must be a terrible thing and they must wonder whether their mother loves them? For left-behind children such as this one, a lot is missing from their lives.

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Pseudonyms have been used.



*The Center for Child Rights and Corporate Social Responsibility (CCR CSR) in China has been a pioneer in advising businesses on Child Rights since 2009. We provide businesses with expertise and services to facilitate change in their work to make permanent improvements in children's lives.*

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