EXAMINING SOCIAL DEVIANCE, INTERACTION, AND SUPPORT AMONG RURAL LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN IN DAFANG COUNTY, CHINA

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SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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ZHENYU ZHANG

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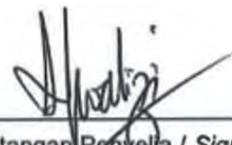
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ABSTRACT

This study aims to address social deviance, social interaction, and social support issues faced by rural left-behind children in Dafang County, China, through the development of a social work framework. The objectives include identifying key problems affecting left-behind children, examining the impact on their development, exploring their coping mechanisms, and addressing challenges faced by the community, school, and family. A new framework for resolving these issues is proposed. Qualitative research and case study methods were employed, with purposive sampling selecting 12 left-behind children, two school staff, one community staff, and three guardians. Data were collected through interviews, observation checklists, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews and participant observations were utilized, with instruments including interview outlines and observation checklists. Data analysis involved transcription, coding, and thorough examination of the collected information. The study revealed that left-behind children primarily suffer from social deviance, social interaction, and social support issues. In terms of social deviance, the main problem is the acceptance of a detrimental subculture, leading to deviant behaviors such as violence and rule violations. Social interaction problems stem from a lack of skills and platforms for interaction, constrained by various factors including capacity, environment, psychology, and teaching. Social support issues arise from insufficient external support, leading to deficits in financial, academic, and emotional assistance. To address these issues, the researcher proposes integrating social work as a supplementary educational approach. This new framework involves collaboration between social workers, communities, schools, and families, effectively reducing the educational burden on these entities and improving the conditions of left-behind children. The study's findings and proposed framework have potential applications in other regions facing similar challenges with left-behind children.

ANALISIS PENYIMPANGAN SOSIAL, INTERAKSI, DAN SOKONGAN DALAM KALANGAN KANAK-KANAK TERBIAR DI DAERAH DAFANG, CHINA

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menangani masalah penyimpangan sosial, interaksi sosial, dan sokongan sosial yang dihadapi oleh kanak-kanak terbiar di luar bandar di Daerah Dafang, China melalui pembangunan rangka kerja kerja sosial. Objektif kajian ini termasuk mengenal pasti masalah utama yang mempengaruhi kanak-kanak terbiar, meneliti kesan terhadap perkembangan mereka, meneroka mekanisme mengatasi masalah mereka, dan menangani cabaran yang dihadapi oleh masyarakat, sekolah, dan keluarga. Satu rangka kerja baharu untuk menyelesaikan isu-isu ini dicadangkan. Kajian kualitatif dan kaedah kajian kes telah digunakan dalam kajian ini. Teknik pensampelan bertujuan digunakan untuk memilih responden iaitu 12 orang kanak-kanak yang terbiar, dua orang kakitangan sekolah, seorang kakitangan komuniti, dan tiga orang penjaga. Data dikumpul melalui temu bual, senarai semak pemerhatian, dan analisis dokumen. Temu bual separa berstruktur dan pemerhatian peserta digunakan, dengan instrumen termasuk protokol temu bual, senarai semak pemerhatian dana analisis dokumen. Analisis data melibatkan transkripsi, pengekodan, dan pemeriksaan teliti terhadap maklumat yang dikumpul. Kajian mendapati bahawa kanak-kanak terbiar terutamanya mengalami masalah penyimpangan sosial, interaksi sosial, dan sokongan sosial. Dalam penyimpangan sosial, masalah utama adalah penerimaan subkultur yang merugikan, yang membawa kepada tingkah laku menyimpang seperti keganasan dan pelanggaran peraturan. Masalah interaksi sosial berpunca daripada kekurangan kemahiran dan platform yang terhad untuk berinteraksi serta pelbagai faktor termasuk keupayaan, persekitaran, psikologi, dan pengajaran. Masalah sokongan sosial timbul daripada kekurangan sokongan luar yang membawa kepada kekurangan bantuan kewangan, akademik, dan emosi. Bagi menangani masalah ini, penyelidik mencadangkan pengintegrasian kerja sosial sebagai pendekatan pendidikan tambahan. Rangka kerja baharu ini melibatkan kerjasama antara pekerja sosial, komuniti, sekolah, dan keluarga secara berkesan bagi mengurangkan beban pendidikan ke atas entiti-entiti ini dan memperbaiki keadaan kanak-kanak terbiar Penemuan kajian dan pembinaan kerangka rangka kerja baru yang dicadangkan mempunyai potensi untuk diaplikasi di kawasan lain yang menghadapi cabaran yang serupa dengan kanak-kanak yang terbiar ini.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1　Introduction

China's economy is proliferating and has become the second largest in the world, with remarkable achievements (Arthur, 2020). China is a vast country with uneven regional development, and the economic strength varies significantly between regions, specifically in terms of economic strength in the East and weakness in the West. The eastern region of China has achieved rapid development with good location advantages and national policy support. The western region has developed relatively slowly and has a significant gap in comprehensive economic strength and per capita income compared to the eastern region (Zhao, 2020).

According to data published by China's National Bureau of Statistics in 2020, China's population is approximately 1.411 billion, of which the rural population is over

900 million (Yang, 2020). Seventy percent of the population in the western region lives in rural areas. The income of these farmers is generally low, and farmers are in a disadvantaged position in the overall social stratification and have a lower quality of life (Jiang, 2018). In such a situation, most farmers urgently need to change their lives, increase their income and improve their social status through various means. Many peasants had to leave their hometowns to find work in the developed eastern regions. In this way, the most extensive social mobility in China's history has emerged. According to China's National Health Care Commission, the size of China's migrant worker population reached 285 million in 2020 (Liu, 2021). Despite the massive size of the migrant population, this mobility trend has not slowed down and has continued to expand.

Ma (2021) informs that the number of migrant workers in China will reach 350 million by 2030. Such a large group is still on the move, but for various reasons, most migrant workers do not take their children out with them but leave them behind in their hometowns. Grandparents, relatives, or friends look after them as guardians. These children attend school in their hometowns and become left-behind children. See Table 1.0 below:

Table 1.1

Statistics of Farmers' Families Going Out to Work in 2016-2021

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Migrant workers (10,000 people)	16934	17185	17266	17663	16959	17172
Family migrant workers (10,000 people)	3377	2966	3055	3088	3022	3025
The proportion of migrant workers out of homes (%)	20.5%	17.2%	17.7%	17.5%	17.8%	17.6%

Source from National Bureau of Statistics of China (Yuan, 2022)

The chart shows that only about 17 percent of farmers who go out to work will take their children with them, and many more will leave their children behind in their hometowns. These children have become left-behind children. As their parents are not around, the children left behind in rural areas lack care and attention, and many of them have problems in their studies, life, and social life, and some have even become "problem children." Their situation deserves our attention (Cheng & Xing, 2020). This study will conduct a case study to understand the impact of the absence of parents on the social deviance, social interaction, and social support of children left behind in rural Dafang County. The study will also explore how external forces can help these left-behind children change their situation and better integrate into society.

1.2 Research Background

Guizhou Province is located in the western region of China and is an economically backward region. This region belongs to the typical karst mountainous terrain. Most of the territory of Guizhou Province is high mountainous hills, and there is less arable land. Guizhou Province ranks fifth from the bottom among Chinese provinces in terms of arable land per capita. At the same time, crop harvests are low in Guizhou Province due to its severe desertification and harsh natural environment (Wang & Zhu, 2019). Low crop yields have directly contributed to the meager farmers' income in the province. In Guizhou province, surplus rural laborers move to the eastern region to work yearly. Guizhou province has a vast number of surplus rural laborers transferred, ranking third in the western region, and is a typical labor exporting province. Guizhou is also one of the provinces with many left-behind children, with 875,000 left-behind children in the province as of October 2021 (Liu, 2022).

Dafang County is located in the northwestern part of Guizhou Province, with a population of 1.03 million and inhabited by 23 ethnic minorities. The county's total area is 3505.29 square kilometers, accounting for 2% of the total area of Guizhou Province. The county's land resources are mainly mountains, slopes, and hills, with fewer basins. The mountainous area of Dafang County accounts for 96.76%. The area of flat land accounts for 3.24%, and the arable land per capita is only 0.00142 square kilometers (Zhao, 2020).

Not only is the area of arable land in Dafang County relatively small, but the land is also infertile. The vast majority of arable land in Dafang County is acidic, and

the soil fertility is low, resulting in low crop yields and low income for farmers in the county. Regarding geography, Dafang County has similar geomorphological features to Guizhou Province. Economically, Dafang County ranks 33rd among 88 counties in Guizhou Province in terms of total economic output, which is at a medium level, and the county's socioeconomic, educational, and cultural development levels are at a medium level in Guizhou Province (Wang & Xiao, 2020). More importantly, Dafang County is a typical labor export county.

Dafang County has a large agricultural population, with 75 percent of the rural population working in agriculture-related jobs and farmers mainly growing traditional crops (Wang, 2021). Due to the relatively small amount of land available in the county, with only 0.00142 square kilometers of arable land per capita, there is an enormous surplus of labor in the countryside without work. In this context, many farmers have moved to the East for work. According to Dafang County Bureau of Statistics statistics, 60% of the rural population (aged 20-50) in Dafang County go out to work. Most migrant workers go out without their children, as taking them to the East would face high economic and educational costs, which most farmers cannot afford, and they are forced to leave their children behind in their hometowns. In this way, many left-behind children have been formed in Dafang County.

According to information released by the Education Bureau of Dafang County, the total number of students in compulsory education in Dafang County in 2021 is 122,403. Of these, 25,378 are rural left-behind children, accounting for 20.7% of the total schoolchildren (Wang, 2021). From 2018 to 2021, the proportion of rural left-behind children to school students will be about twenty percent. The number of children

left behind in rural areas is high, and the proportion is large (Wang, 2021). See Table 1.2 below:

Table 1.2

Statistics on rural left-behind children of primary school students in Dafang County

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of left-behind children in rural areas	19029	18484	25741	25378

Data source: Dafang County Human Resources and Social Security Bureau (2022)

In summary, Dafang County is very similar to the overall situation of Guizhou Province in terms of the geographical environment, economic level, the export of surplus rural labor, and the fundamental development of rural left-behind children. Therefore, the researcher chose to study the rural left-behind children in Dafang County, and the empirical study is highly representative and has general significance in Guizhou Province.

1.3   Problem Statement

The researcher's search of the literature through the database revealed that the results of existing research on the development of left-behind children in rural Dafang County are minimal. As of 2023, the researcher has found four journal papers (Zhang, 2007; Wang, 2009; Hu, 2014; An, 2018), three master's theses (Zhang, 2006; Wang, 2014; Tang, 2019), and no doctoral theses studying the problem of left-behind children in

Dafang County. The research results are obviously insufficient for Dafang County. At the same time, the researcher found that the existing seven papers study the problem of left-behind children through the perspective of sociology or pedagogy. None of the papers used social work to intervene in the education of left-behind children to solve their social interaction, social deviation and social support problems, so there is a gap in the research on the application of social work to the education of local left-behind children.

In several primary schools in Dafang County, some left-behind children do not obey the school rules and teachers and even get into fights, provocations, extortion, and bullying in schools. Some of the left-behind children have even committed crimes. The government forces these children to be sent to special schools for control and study. More than 40 percent of left-behind children have had social deviation problems (Tang, 2019). The researcher states this situation very worrying.

Wang (2019) attributes the problem of social deviance among left-behind children to poor guardianship. Lv and Cui (2024) mention that teachers only pay attention to students with good grades and neglect the education of left-behind children with deviant behaviors. This leads to an increase in antagonism between left-behind children and teachers, and the problem of left-behind children's deviant behaviors becomes more and more serious. The researcher mentions that it is difficult for guardians to stop the problem of deviance in left-behind children.

From 2020 to 2021, the problems facing left-behind children in rural areas are even more acute (Zhao, 2021). Due to COVID-19, the Chinese government restricts

people's movement. Many parents working in the eastern region have been unable to return home for long periods. When parents are absent for long periods, the parent-child relationship becomes strained, and the left-behind children are more reluctant to listen to their parent's teachings. The incidence of abnormal behavior among left-behind children has risen, and there has been an increase in the number of vicious incidents such as fights and assaults among left-behind children at school. (Zhang & Wen, 2021).

Young (2022) mentions that the reason for the social interaction problems of left-behind children is the failure of school education. With the reality of prioritizing achievement, many schools pay attention to knowledge education but fail to guide children to correct interpersonal communication, and students are unable to understand the importance of interpersonal communication and fail to master the relevant social interaction skills. This is why children have problems with social interaction. Chen (2023) states that left-behind children's parents are absent for a long time and do not have the opportunity to teach them social interaction skills, leading to their low social interaction skills and difficulty in interacting with others.

Families of left-behind children are vulnerable to exclusion and isolation from their peer groups, which affects their social interactions. Some non-left-behind children see left-behind children as an alternative group and refuse to socialize with them. As a result, left-behind children have narrower friendships and difficulties making friends (Qian, 2019). Wei (2023) conducted a survey in several communities in Guizhou Province and found that about 35 per cent of left-behind children had social interaction problems. This is a considerable percentage. The findings show that left-behind children do not know how to interact with others, have a lack of social interaction skills,

and are often ostracised by groups of non-left-behind children. The researcher mentions that left-behind children's self-isolation, exclusion from the outside world, and lack of training in social interaction skills at school affect interpersonal interactions.

Some left-behind children in rural areas of Dafang County face social support problems. These left-behind children mainly lack economic support and academic support. More than 20 percent of left-behind children in many schools need access to outside social support, and they are desperate for help (An, 2018). Tang (2019) mentions that in Dafang County, as one of the most important external support forces, the community only provides necessary material support for left-behind children and does not involve other support aspects. Schools also only endeavor to provide material support for left-behind children and do not provide targeted support specifically for left-behind children. The researcher mentions that left-behind children generally lack the support of social forces and do not have a complete social network system to support the development of left-behind children.

The researcher states that the failure of schools, families, and communities to perform their educational functions effectively is an essential cause of the problem of children being left behind. In this case, a new working model should be adopted to play a complementary and coordinating role. Social work can be involved in the education of children as a complementary approach (Milner, Myers, & O'Byrne, 2020). Therefore, the focus of this study is how to address the social deviance, social interaction and social support problems faced by left-behind children through the social work approach.

1.4 Purpose of The Study

This study explores the problems in the development of left-behind children in Dafang County, Guizhou Province. The aim is to discover the factors influencing these problems and to propose solutions and countermeasures. Left-behind children are a phenomenon that has arisen in the transfer of many surplus labourers from rural to urban areas in China. This particular group is a difficult group that has emerged during China's social transformation. The problems left-behind children face are bound to persist over the long term.

This study reveals the current situation and characteristics of rural left-behind children. It explores the process and mechanism of the problem of rural left-behind children and the social problems it brings through the investigation of the problem of rural left-behind children. The researcher applies relevant theories to analyze the deep-rooted causes of the problems of left-behind children. The researcher explores the impact on left-behind children due to the failure of communities, schools, and families to function fully. The researcher hopes to understand the current education situation of left-behind children through this study to help schools, families, and communities provide more comprehensive and flexible education services and improve the quality of education. The researcher provides research results by understanding left-behind children's living conditions, needs, and challenges. Provide a reference for the government to formulate more precise and effective policies. To urge the government to provide better support and services to help left-behind children live and develop better. At the same time, through disseminating the research results, the researcher has brought more public attention to the group of left-behind children, raised public

awareness of the problem of left-behind children, and prompted more people to care about and participate in the efforts to solve this problem.

1.5   Objectives of The Study

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1.   To identify the main problems rural left-behind children encounter in Dafang County during their development.

2.   To identify the impact of rural left-behind children in Dafang County when encountering social deviance, social interaction, and social support problems.

3.   To explore the coping of left-behind children in rural areas of Dafang County in the face of social deviance, social interaction, and social support problems.

4.   To identify the challenges that the local communities, schools and families in addressing the problems of left-behind children in rural areas.

5.   To propose a new framework for solving the problems of social deviance, social interaction, and social support for rural left-behind children in Dafang County.

1.6   Research Questions

Based on the problem statement, this research aims to discover the following five research questions:

1. What are the main problems encountered in the development of rural left-behind children in Dafang County?

2. What are the impact of rural left-behind children in Dafang County when encountering social deviance, social interaction, and social support problems?

3. How do these rural left-behind children cope with the problems in the aspects of social deviance, social interaction, and social support?

4. What are the challenges do the local communities, schools and families in addressing the problems of left-behind children in rural areas?

5. How can this research develop a new framework on solving the problems of social deviance, social interaction, and social support?

1.7   Conceptual Framework

This research was conducted using the qualitative research method. Through qualitative research, the researcher will obtain the study subjects' views, perceptions, and values. The fundamental analysis and action taken are based on sociological-related theories, namely Cultural identity theory, Social exchange theory, and Social support theory. Left-behind children face three problems in their development: social deviance, social interaction, and social support issues. To address these three issues, the researcher has used different theories to explain these phenomena and build models to solve these problems

The researcher uses social work as a complementary educational means to address the three problems left-behind children encounter. Therefore, the conceptual

framework of this study is based on three models of social work: (a) the case work model (b) the group work model (c) the community work model.

Social deviance is frightening behaviors that deviate from current values or social norms. Howard (2018) states that social deviance violates group norms. That is, as long as one can identify the norms of behavior that a group presents to its members, one can know whether the member is adhering to or violating these norms and thus determine whether the member's behavior is deviant. For primary school students nowadays, being conscientious, honest, and ethical is the social norm. Breaking the relevant school rules is deviant behavior.

The problems of social deviation that arise in left-behind children are different. It is not appropriate to gather them into a group and educate them through group work; they should be treated and dealt with separately. Therefore, a case work model is more appropriate for such individuals. Case work emphasizes the 'specificity' of the recipient and works one-to-one to change the recipient's problems (Getnet & Abebaw, 2022). Sui (2019) states that the deviant behavior of left-behind children can be corrected through the case work model because the one-to-one contact brings the two individuals closer together and helps to consider each other's specific needs and wishes. As a result, case work can gain a sense of intimacy and uniqueness that is not present in any other form of communication.

The case work will be conducted using cultural identity theory. The researcher informs that the reason for the deviant behavior of left-behind children is wrong subcultural influences. Under the influence of this culture, left-behind children engage

in behaviors inconsistent with their identity as students. The purpose of the researcher's action is to educate this group of left-behind children about the mainstream culture so that they can identify the difference between the mainstream culture and the transgressive subculture, strengthen their identification with the mainstream culture, and correct their deviant behaviors at an early date. Erikson (2008) mentions that people acquire cultural identity through the experience of social interactions, social environments, and social events. This identity is expressed in the individual's identification with dominant values, beliefs, and behaviors.

The researcher informs that education can enhance the self-confidence of the children left behind, improve their interaction skills and change the existing difficulties in social interaction. Adopting a group work model in the education process is a good option. The researcher mentions that the main application of social exchange theory is in conducting group activities. Some left-behind children have difficulties in social interaction, partly because of their weak communicative skills and low self-confidence. On the other hand, they are less likely to interact with others because they are unsure whether they will gain from doing so. To attract left-behind children to participate in group activities and sustain their education, social workers must design programs that make them feel that joining the group is valuable and meaningful. They give in exchange for the resources they need.

Children can develop their learning and cognitive skills in group activities where they can learn from each other through interaction with peer groups. Children are mentally happy and relaxed during group activities, which helps them to learn and communicate in a relaxed state (De Greeff, Bosker, Oosterlaan, Visscher, & Hartman,

2018). Interpersonal interactions exist in all aspects of life. Every individual has the right and desire to interact with others. When individuals feel abandoned by the collective, they show strong feelings of defiance and hostility, which can even affect the individual's psychological changes and healthy development (Ganimete, 2018). Therefore, improving left-behind children's social and communication skills is crucial.

The poor social interaction of some left-behind children with their peer groups is a prominent problem. This situation affects the ability of left-behind children to interact socially. The most crucial interaction group for left-behind children in rural areas is the peer group, and children cannot grow up without the participation of the peer group. Through interaction with peer groups, children develop their expressive and social communication skills and initially learn and gradually integrate into society (Jaupart, 2018).

Some left-behind children face social support problems. They live in poverty, have poor academic performance, or are emotionally deprived. They lack support from external social forces, and their social network support system is incomplete. The researcher believes that community work should be done to get more external support for the children left behind to change their situation.

The researcher has mainly used social support theory in conducting community work. Wen (2017) states that social support refers to the sum of behaviors of specific social networks that provide unpaid help to socially disadvantaged groups using specific material and moral means and is generally an umbrella term for external support for the social behaviors of disadvantaged groups. Good social support is good

for physical and mental health. Social support can, on the one hand, give substantial material help to individuals and, on the other hand, alleviate the emotional state of individuals under the high pressure of the current external environment. The researcher states that carrying out community work is to build a comprehensive social support network for left-behind children by conducting surveys, understanding the recipients' external environment, and enlisting the support of external social forces whenever possible.

The researcher informs that left-behind children most need financial, academic, and emotional support from outside forces. Vikram (2023) investigated several primary schools in India and found that some of the left-behind children suffered from malnutrition, a condition that affects students' learning. The malnutrition status of the students was related to the poverty status of the guardian's family. Arlini et al. (2019) found high dropout rates among left-behind children in East Java, Indonesia. The important reason for dropout is the poor academic performance of left-behind children, which leads to the development of aversion to learning among left-behind children.

Bussarawan and John (2021) state the social networks of rural children left behind as 'empty.' Weakened relationships with people in the neighborhood are the main reason for the neglect of children left behind. Due to the prolonged absence of their parents, left-behind children have little interaction with those around them and feel very isolated. Everyone needs to stay connected to others and be cared for by others. If this need is not met, a person can feel lonely (Golberstein, Wen, & Miller, 2020).

As a vulnerable group, left-behind children are extremely deprived of personal resources. Left-behind children now have resources that do not provide them with adequate support for themselves. This leads to financial, academic, and emotional problems. Left-behind children are in urgent need of help in all areas through social networks. The community work model addresses related issues. At the heart of the community work model is mobilizing all available resources around the recipient to provide help. For rural left-behind children, the researcher will build a social network support map through community work to help them increase social support and expand social resources from seven areas: community, school, charities, social workers, volunteers, relatives, and neighbors, which enables rural left-behind children to receive more help.

The researcher mentions that the failure of the three organizations, namely, the community, the school, and the family, to function effectively has led to the current plight of the left-behind children. In order to change the current situation of left-behind children, it is necessary to adjust the existing mode of operation.

The researcher states that rural left-behind children mainly face social deviance, social interaction, and social support problems in their development, significantly impacting their learning, culture, and health. When faced with these problems, some left-behind children have thought and coped. Communities, schools, and families have also coped. Unfortunately, the results of coping are not satisfactory. In this context, education needs to be supplemented by incorporating a social work approach that coordinates the actions of the community, the school, and the family to form a new

framework of cooperation in education. The researcher developed a conceptual

framework based on the purpose of the study and the research questions.

The conceptual framework is illustrated below:

Figure 1.1

Conceptual Framework of the Study
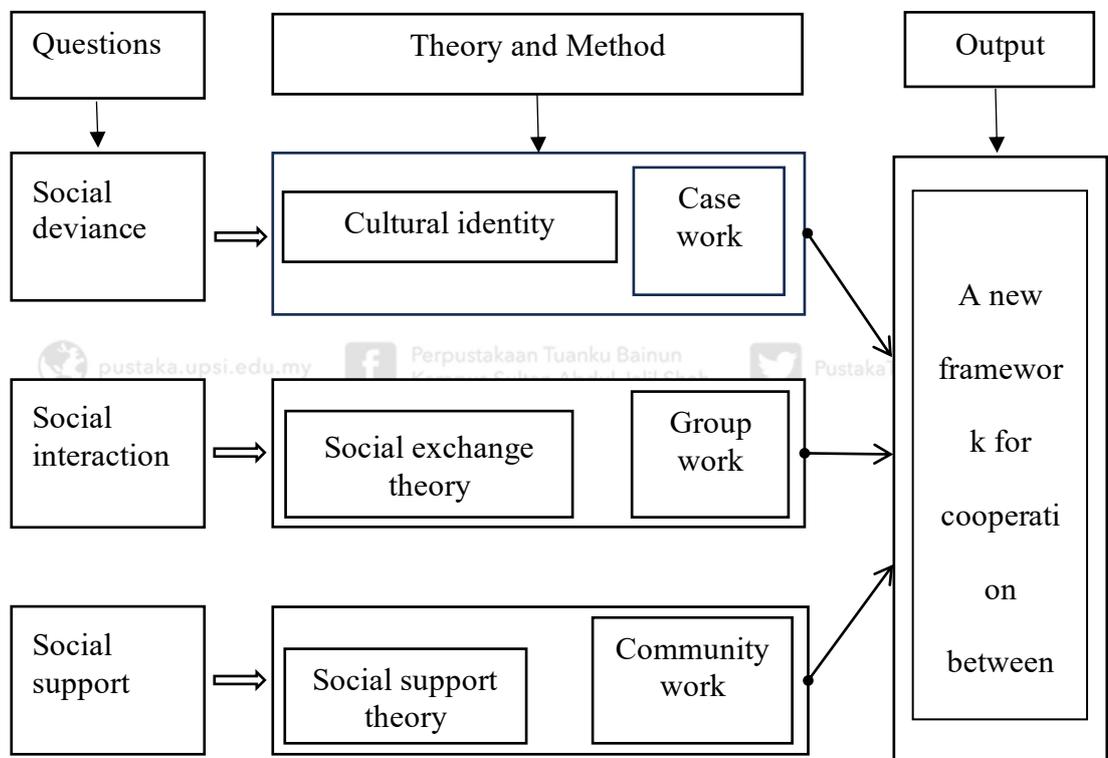
1.8   Significance of The Study

The relevance of this study is that:

Firstly, the total number of left-behind children in primary schools in Dafang County has reached about 25,000. In many schools, the number of left-behind children accounts for 20 percent of the total (Wang, 2021). This group is large in number. However, this group is a specific vulnerable group that needs people's care. Given China's current development situation, this group of left-behind children cannot be eliminated in the short term, and this group is bound to exist for a long time. It is of great practical importance to study this group, to identify its development problems and seek solutions.

Secondly, the research area chosen by the researcher belongs to a specific rural area in China where left-behind children gather, and the research subjects chosen are representative. Therefore, the research methodology adopted and the results obtained have substantial promotional value and can be used as a reference for other researchers to study rural left-behind children in other areas using the same model.

Thirdly, the researcher searched for research results on left-behind children in Dafang County through various channels but found only seven papers and few research results. Therefore, this study has solid practical value.

In conclusion, in the case of Guizhou Province, the findings and conclusions of this project can add local knowledge to the study of left-behind children in rural

Guizhou Province and make possible a cross-sectional comparative study. Most counties and cities in Guizhou province have left-behind children. Therefore, the data and findings obtained in this study can provide rich material for future longitudinal and follow-up studies. At the same time, relevant departments in Dafang County can also refer to the data and findings of this study when formulating policies for left-behind children to develop effective child welfare policies.

1.9   Limitations of The Study

In this study, although the researcher conducted in-depth interviews on the development of left-behind children and achieved concrete research results that drew the attention of the community in the region to this group, there were still certain limitations in the actual research process. Firstly, the researcher planned to select more schools in Dafang County for interviews to make the study representative and comprehensive. The researcher had already contacted the schools' principals in the early stage and received their support and consent for the researcher to enter the schools to conduct the interviews. Due to the impact of COVID-19, many schools have adopted stricter protection measures, prohibiting people other than staff from entering the schools and refusing the researcher's request to enter the schools for interviews, which narrowed the scope of the researcher's interviews and reduced the sources of information obtained.

Secondly, in this interview, the researcher used cultural identity theory in the case work to examine the socially deviant behavior of the left-behind children. The researcher mainly used social exchange theory to study the social interaction behavior

of left-behind children. The researcher used social support theory in community work to study how left-behind children can get more social network support. There are also theories related to social work practice that can be used to analyze and deal with these behaviors of children left behind. Alternatively, several theories can be overlaid to analyze and deal with these behaviors. The limitations of the researcher's knowledge did not integrate more theories to create a more effective theoretical framework to address the issue of left-behind children.

Thirdly, as the interviewees were children, they saw the researcher as a stranger and had difficulty gaining sufficient trust and security in the short term. When the researcher previously conducted pilot interviews at the neighboring Q Primary School, he found some of the children to be unmotivated and uncooperative. For example, they could answer questions at will without careful thought. When the researcher carried out social work activities, some left-behind children showed indifference and rejection. The researcher underestimated the difficulties beforehand, which made some activities not designed to have the desired effect.

1.10   Operational Definition

1.10.1 Left-behind Children in Rural Areas

The group of left-behind children emerged in the mid-1990s. The concept of left-behind children was first introduced in 1994. Chinese sociologist ShangGuan (1994)

introduced the concept of "left-behind children" in his article "Left-behind children should receive attention." ShangGuan mentioned out that with the rapid development of China's economy, more farmers would go to work in developed areas. However, for various reasons, most of the children of farmers are unable to follow their parents to the developed regions. These children will have to stay in their hometowns. As a result, a new group of children will emerge in Chinese society. This group is known as the group of left-behind children.

Madhavan, Townsend, and Garey (2008) state that children left behind are usually children who have grown up in their home countries and have been left behind by adult migrants in the custody of others. One or both parents may leave their children with family members, friends, the wider community, and childcare institutions. It is common for parents to leave children in their country of origin for short or long periods, particularly in countries with seasonal migration due to agriculture. In this context of the study, the left-behind children respondents were primary school students. Their age was 10-12 years old.

1.10.2 Socialization

Cole and Tan (2015) state that socialization is a process of introducing people to social norms and customs. This process helps individuals to function well in society and, in turn, contributes to the smooth functioning of society. Family members, teachers, religious leaders, and peers play a role in a person's socialization process. He argues that this process usually occurs in two stages: primary socialization occurs from birth

to adolescence, while secondary socialization continues throughout a person's life. Adult socialization may occur whenever people find themselves in new situations where they are about to interact with people whose norms or customs differ from their own. In this context of the study, the socialization process mainly involves left-behind children being influenced by teachers, guardians, peer groups, etc., in the community, school, and family. Left-behind children internalize cultural norms and gradually acquire and adapt to social norms, values, and behavior codes.

1.10.3 Social Deviance

Zheng (2020) states that social deviance refers to the behavior of members of society (including social individuals, social groups, and social organizations) that deviates from or violates existing social norms. The main types of deviant behavior include. (a) Misconduct. Refers to conduct by an individual that violates a specific regulatory rule on a specific occasion but does not cause significant harm to society. Although such behavior may cause grievances, it is not usually formally punished. (b) Abnormal behavior. Refers to an individual's behavior that violates social norms due to mental illness and psychopathology. (c) Self-destructive behavior. It refers to self-destructive behaviors of individuals against social norms, such as drug abuse, alcoholism, and suicide. (d) Unethical behavior. Refers to the behavior of individuals that violates the norms of people's daily life and behavior. Such behavior is usually condemned by public opinion. (e) Anti-social behavior. Refers to behavior by an individual that causes harm or even severe damage to others and society. (f) Criminal act. Refers to conduct that violates criminal law and is criminally punishable. It is the most severe anti-social

behavior, but not all anti-social behavior constitutes a crime. Only anti-social behavior that breaks the criminal law is a crime.

In this context of the study, the social deviance that occur in left-behind children are mainly inappropriate behaviors. That is to say, they violated the school's management rules but did not cause harm to society, so they would not be formally punished. Specifically, this study's deviant behaviors of left-behind children include aversion to learning, absenteeism, Internet addiction, fighting, stealing, and early love.

1.10.4 Social Interaction

Michael (2017) states that social interaction refers to the interdependent social interaction activities between individuals and individuals, individuals and groups, and groups and groups through disseminating social information. Social interaction is the process by which individuals take social action in response to others and react to the social behavior of others. Individuals who are aware of their behavior's impact on others will continually adjust their behavior to achieve positive interactions with others. In this context of the study, the primary research is on how left-behind children can improve their social interaction skills, increase their opportunities to interact with others, and change the status quo of social interaction difficulties.

1.10.5 Social Support

Blokdyk (2018) states that social support is the ability of an individual to receive material and moral help from the community, social networks, relatives and friends in times of distress. Such help can have a very positive effect on the individual's ability to improve an existing situation. In this context of the study, social support mainly refers to social workers mobilizing social forces and seeking help from external forces. To establish a perfect social support network for the left-behind children and to support them economically, academically, and emotionally.

1.10.6 Social Work

Brenda and Karla (2018) mention social work includes improving human and social conditions and alleviating human suffering and social problems. It is a professional approach to enhancing people's abilities and functioning to access social support and resources. Social work helps individuals and groups improve their social environment and enables them to better adapt to life by creating humane and responsive social services. In this context of the study, the main purpose is to examine how to carry out social work actions to supplement the current educational actions for left-behind children. How to strengthen and coordinate the linkage between various organizations through social work to solve the problems of left-behind children.

1.10.7 Case Work

Farley (2016) mentions case work as a way of helping people to solve problems. It is a personal, scientific, and artistic work. Case work helps individuals deal with personal matters and matters in the external environment. It helps by mobilizing personal and other resources to deal with issues by establishing a one-to-one professional working relationship. Interviewing and assessment are vital tools in case work. It uses the motivation of the case work relationship to influence the person to change their attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors. During the casework process, staff interprets one or more of the community services that the client may need to access. The study includes the potential impact, understanding, and influence of physical, psychological, and social factors on an individual's behavior. As such, it is both physical, psychological, and social. Case work starts with the individual and the family. It helps the individual establish a one-to-one professional working relationship and use specific knowledge and methods. Internal and external resources are mobilized to solve social functioning problems and make the individual's social life more satisfactory. In this context of the study, case work was mainly used to study the social deviance of left-behind children.

1.10.8 Group Work

Rengasamy (2011) mentions group work refers to a method of intervention where individuals come together in groups to work towards a common goal or purpose, facilitated by a trained social group worker. The focus of this approach is on enhancing the well-being of group members through mutual support, mutual aid, and collective

action. In this context of the study, group work was mainly used to study the social interaction of left-behind children.

1.10.9 Community Work

Alan (2008) informs that community work is a form of social work intervention that aims to educate community residents to actively participate in community governance, consciously safeguard their legitimate rights and interests and social welfare, and strive to achieve social justice with the help of the government and society. The community establishes a social service system of mutual assistance, cooperation, and aid. The aim is to foster and strengthen the community's sense of belonging through the active participation of community residents in community management, to reduce the sense of alienation from the community, and to enhance community integration and self-solving. Community work is a deliberate action and process. Community workers often use collective action to encourage mutual assistance, autonomy, and self-determination among residents and enhance their capacities. The main objective of community work is to meet the community's needs. It solves community problems, develops a sense of belonging and identity among community members, promotes community integration, improves the quality of community life, and achieves social equity. In this context of the study, community work was mainly used to study the social support of left-behind children.

1.10.10 Subculture

Cohen (2011) informs subculture as an alternative culture that contradicts the dominant culture. Behavioral norms specific to subcultures contradicting the dominant culture are the cause of transgression. Subcultures arise as a result of imperfections in the socialization process. Deviance and delinquency are the result of the creation of subcultures. Subcultures are created when individuals form a group that shares values different from mainstream societal values. Crime is a consequence of the union of young people into so-called subcultures in which deviant values and moral concepts dominate. These delinquent subcultures are characterized above all by their deviant values and morals, which enable their members to gain prestige and recognition. In this context of the study, subculture mainly refers to various bad cultures that cause deviant behaviors in left-behind children.

1.10.11 Loneliness

Cherry (2023) states that loneliness is a state of isolation or solitude experienced by a person. Loneliness makes a person feel empty, alone, and unwanted. Lonely people often crave human contact, but their psychological state makes connecting with others more difficult. In this context of the study, loneliness mainly refers to the lack of emotional support for left-behind children, resulting in isolation.

1.11 Summary

This study explores how social workers can use a professional social work approach to change the current plight of left-behind children in rural Dafang County. Specifically, the objectives of this study are: (a) To change the social deviance of left-behind children through case work. (b) To change the social interaction behavior of left-behind children through group activities. (c) To expand the social support network of left-behind children through community work. Three proven social work methods were used in this study, each incorporating relevant theory and a rigorous program design. The researcher obtained data through participant observation and on-site interviews and then collated and analyzed the data to identify the causes of the problems and propose appropriate solutions. The conclusions drawn from the study are of outstanding generalizability, and the methodology used and the conclusions drawn can be used as a model for other researchers to conduct research in other areas. The next chapter will explain the literature review and the use of the conceptual framework.