

A SURVEY AND INVESTIGATION OF THE SOCIAL LIVING STATUS OF FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS IN CENTRAL CHINA

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Abstract

With China's rapid economic growth and accelerating urbanization process, a large group of migrant workers leave the countryside and flock into cities to work and secure a better life for their families. Among this national rise of tide work, the female migrant workers constitute more than 40% flowing workforce in cities. As farmers, workers, and the women, the female migrant workers had to deal with their multiple identities, meanwhile, they have made important contributions to China's economic and social development. However, they remain the vulnerable group who need much more attention. In reality, many female migrant workers suffer the limitation of city Hukou household-registration and endure workplace discrimination, and they can hardly safeguard their legal rights due to the lack of a sound social security mechanism. To tackle the associated social issues, we took an investigation and conducted the survey for the current living situations of female migrant workers through questionnaire and case study. Through the analysis of the major problems and urgent needs, we then proposed the ways of building a supporting system for female migrant workers involving government and society help from the perspectives of system construction, legal protection, skill training and identical treatment, so as to build up a comprehensive and multilateral-participation social security framework for female migrant workers.

Keywords: Female Migrant Workers, Urbanization process, flowing workforce in cities, Urban Life Situation, Social security mechanism, Workplace discrimination, Multilateral-participation social security framework

1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The rapid development of modernization and urbanization has attracted numerous farmers to migrate into cities for working and living. As the cities and the third industry boom, more and more female farmers flock into cities for jobs, whom are called as "female migrant workers". *The 2014 Survey Report of Migrant Workers in China* discloses that the total number of migrant workers in China has reached 250 million, of which, 94.15 million are local farmers, 158.63 million are migrant farmers, and among the migrant peasants, 32.79 million farmers migrate with their whole family. The gender distribution shows that male migrant workers account for 65.9%, and female migrant workers account for the rest 34.1%, which signals that female migrant workers have become the fresh force of city construction. However, the social structure of urban-rural separation and traditional gender culture induces that the human capital of female farmers is weaker than the male ones. The weakness in human capital of female farmers becomes more obvious after they move into cities, and thus bringing the social and economic pressure towards them.

The reason why we initiate this survey derives from our intensive concerns for the insufficient security for the rights and interest of female migrant workers. They are a special group with triple roles of farmers, worker and female, under the strong influence of traditional patriarchal culture, most of them are engaged in the arduous and menial jobs in cities, and suffer great pressure arising from the market competition mechanism embodying the survival of the fittest and the pursuit of profit maximization. Therefore, the female migrant workers are deemed as the vulnerable group in most unfavorable situation. It's of great significance for us to concern with their rights and interests. In consideration of their specialty, I set up a survey team to investigate the living situations of female farmer workers. We targeted on the female migrant workers who work on construction sites in Wuhan City and conducted a questionnaire of "The Current Living Situation of Female Peasant Workers". We sent 40 questionnaire forms and received 40 forms back, among which, 40 ones were effective, the recovery rate was 100% and the questionnaire effective rate was 100%. In addition, we also interviewed 6 persons. We adopted the empirical approaches, such as filed investigation, questionnaire and case study, to research the living situation of female migrant workers in Wuhan City from the aspects of life, work, rights and interests, then we studied the cases and collected the primary materials through individual interviews, finally analyzed and concluded the living problems faced by the female migrant workers, so as to tackle the problems about their basic needs and propose some suggestions.

2. THE URBAN LIFE SITUATIONS OF FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE SURVEY

2.1. Demographic information

The analysis results about the sample survey are shown in the below table: the majority of the the female migrant workers are married; their education level is generally low; most of them migrate into cities to alleviate the family burden; they have long time of migrant working experience with low monthly wage, and the basic expenditure accounts for a quite high percentage in their wage (See Table 1).

2.1.1 Basic Information

Table 1. Basic Information

Demographic Information		Quantity	Proportion (%)
Marital Status	Single	5	12.5%
	Married	35	87.5%
	Divorced	0	0.0
Education degree	Junior and below	25	62.5%
	Senior	11	27.5%
	Higher education	4	10.0%
Purpose of working	Incomes	32	80.0%
	Unoccupied	7	17.5%
	Learn skills	1	2.5%
Years of working	Less than 2 years	4	10.0%
	2-6 years	27	67.5%
	More than 2 years	9	22.5%
Monthly Income (Yuan)	1500 and below	0	0.0
	1501-2000	16	40.0%
	2001-3000	16	40.0%
	3001 and above	8	20.0%
Monthly Expenses (Yuan)	800 and below	19	47.5%
	801-1500	17	42.5%
	1501-2500	4	10.0%
	2501 and above	0	0.0

2.1.2. Accommodation

Considering the specialty of their works, the project departments provide the female migrant workers with simple, crude and crowded dormitories. In this survey, most of the female migrant workers are still live in such dormitories (See Table 2).

Table 2. Live in dormitories

Frequency	Quantity	Proportion (%)	Note
Always	35	87.5%	
Sometimes	2	5.0%	
Never	3	7.5%	

2.1.3. Employment channels

The interviews indicate that most of the female migrant workers find their jobs through either being introduced by their acquaintances or going directly to the companies.

2.1.4. Monthly Incomes

The monthly incomes of the female migrant workers concentrated in the range of 1,501-3,000 yuan, which is far lower than the minimum wage standard of Hubei Province.

2.1.5. Consumption

This survey indicates that in terms of the consumption structure, the biggest expense in the total expenditure of female migrant workers is still the basic living expense for daily consumer goods (See Table 3).

Table 3. Priority of expenses

Order	Type of expenses	Quantity	Proportion (%)
1	Basic living	38	95.0%
2	Relationship	0	0.0
3	Leisure	0	0.0
4	Education and Training	2	5.0%

2.1.6. Entertainment

The recreation is also an indicator used for measuring living situation. The results of survey samples indicate that in the non-working time, the majority of female migrant workers will choose to have a rest (See Table 4).

Table 4. Form of entertainment

Order	Form of entertainment	Quantity	Proportion (%)
1	Rest at home	37	92.5%
2	Watching TV	1	2.5%
3	Shopping	1	2.5%
4	Dining and KTV	1	2.5%
5	Mobile and Computer	0	0.0
6	Studying	0	0.0

2.1.7. Working hours

In terms of the working hours, the average daily working hours of female migrant works is 9.6 hours, and most of them have to work 8-10 hours every day. Their working hours are over long. In addition, they have no holidays and can only take a few days off during the Spring Festival.

2.1.8. Marital status

About 50% interviewed female migrant workers started their relationship by the introduction of their acquaintances, 50% chose blind date, and a few of them chose free love.

2.1.9. Problems concerning rights and interests

This survey discovers that the female migrant workers know little about legal knowledge, labor union and women's federation. When meeting with difficulties, they always turn to relatives, friends and fellow-townsmen. They have little awareness of formal social support and legal rights protection. (See Table 5)

Table 5 Rights and interests

Knowledge and familiarity		Very well	Well	Adequate	Little	No idea
Labor union and women's federation	Quantity	0	9	12	18	1
	Proportion (%)	0.0	22.5%	30.0%	45.0%	2.5%
Labor laws	Quantity	0	10	16	12	2
	Proportion (%)	0.0	25.0%	40.0%	30.0%	5.0%

2.1.10. Social insurances

This survey discovers that a large number of female migrant workers have not heard about the five social insurances system, and they have no idea about maternity insurance and unemployment insurance. Most of them think that it is unnecessary to participate in the social insurances and are quite reluctant to take any portion of exiguous wage to pay for pension and medical insurance.

3. THE MAIN PROBLEMS FACED BY FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS

3.1. Low wages and welfare

The basic data in Table 6 indicates that the overall wage level of the investigated female migrant workers is concentrated in the range of 1,501-3,000 yuan. However, according to the survey data published by National Bureau of Statistics, the average wage in Wuhan City in 2014 is 3,783 yuan. The investigated female migrant workers may account for 20% of this range, which means that the wage level of most female migrant workers is lower than the social average wage.

Table 6. Wages and Welfare

Treatment	Order	Quantity	Proportion (%)
Wages (Yuan)	1500 and below	0	0.0
	1501-2000	16	40.0%
	2001-3000	16	40.0%
	3001 and above	8	20.0%
Welfare	Often	3	7.5%
	Seldom	29	72.5%
	Never	8	20.0%

3.2. Gender discrimination at work

3.2.1 Unjust work arrangement

Firstly, in terms of the position, the male migrant workers mainly work in technical fields, while the female migrant workers in logistic service departments, whom can be easily replaced and have little training opportunities. Then, the female migrant workers have few promotion chances and they are almost unavailable to leading positions.

3.2.2 Unequal wages

Most of the female migrant workers engage in menial jobs due to their low education level. Their wages are not only much lower than the social average level, but also quite lower than the wage of male migrant workers.

3.2.3 Unsound social security systems

The current social security system does not fully cover benefits for all the female migrant workers, yet its implementation is not very effective, which are mainly reflected in the following five aspects:

Firstly, insurance coverage is limited. The survey indicates that 45% female migrant workers dose not participate in the basic pension insurance and basic medical insurance; and almost 50% female migrant workers have not enjoyed any social welfare projects.

Secondly, participant rate of pension insurance is low. Because some enterprises refuse to buy social insurances for migrant workers for the sake of reducing cost, and the pension insurance implementation system is still not robust enough, a large group of migrant workers have not participated in pension insurance though eligible for it.

Thirdly, work injury compensation rate is low. The survey indicates that only 39.2% female migrant workers enjoy work injury insurance, but they do not receive compensations on time or in full amount.

Fourthly, maternity insurance is unavailable. Many female migrant workers cannot enjoy the maternity insurance. What's worse, when pregnant, they could be dismissed, if not dismissed, they can hardly enjoy the treatment stipulated by national policies.

Fifthly, medical insurance are very ineffective. The samples indicate that 50% female migrant workers choose to buy medicines by themselves when getting sick; and 37% of them choose to see a doctor in small clinics, and most of them rarely use their Medicare cards.

Main reasons for the above-mentioned condition are as follows:

Firstly, they know nothing about social insurances; Secondly, they are reluctant to participate in social insurances; thirdly, it's difficult for them to participate in social insurances; Fourthly, it's difficult for them to handle with the transference and continuation of social insurances.

4. Most Desired Assistance of Female Migrant Workers

The selection results of the survey samples indicate that though live at the foot of the social ladder, the female migrant workers hope for social care rather than discrimination. They desire highly for a bright future and a better life.

Table 7. Most Desired Assistance

Order	Type of assistance	Quantity	Proportion (%)
1	Accommodation	21	52.5%
2	Health	10	25.0%
3	Work	3	7.5%
4	Children's education	3	7.5%
5	Equity and interest	2	5.0%
6	Skills training	1	2.5%

5. SUGGESTIONS

Through the above analyses, it is advised to support female migrant workers in two aspects, i.e. strengthening the support intensity of government policies and strengthening the intensity of social cares.

5.1 Strengthen the government policy support

5.1.1. Improve system construction

5.1.1.1 Solve deficiencies of basic medical insurance system

Construct the comprehensive social insurance coverage of "five insurances united into one", particularly covering the group of people with rural household registration but have no permanent jobs; and meanwhile, it shall promote the voluntary transfer between the town-level basic health-care insurance and new rural cooperative medical care according to the changes of individual labor relations during their migrating employment; then it shall also solve the remote implementation of medical insurance system, and build up a trans-provincial, trans-municipal and cross-regional green health insurance channels.

5.1.1.2 Improve the enforcement of work-related insurance, maternity insurance and unemployment insurance

We suggest the government to strengthen enforcement on purchasing work-related insurance, maternity insurance and unemployment insurance, and stipulate them as mandatory insurances; supervise the

employing units with a large group of female migrant workers in handling the work-related insurance, maternity insurance and unemployment insurance of all staff, so as to ensure the legal rights of female migrant workers and reduce the risk of employing units.

5.1.1.3 Carry out the residence permit security system

Interim Measures of Residence Permit Management of Wuhan City has been implemented since March 15, 2011 in Wuhan, which stipulates that any person at or above the age of 16 years who lives in Wuhan for over 30 days for work, business or study but does not have the Wuhan household registration are required to apply for residence permit. The residence permit holders are entitled to enjoy ten items of citizen rights and public services, including employment, children education, social insurances, vocational training and so on. Residence permit system is a transitional measure in household registration system revolution, which is a good step to improve the current situation of migrant workers by means of system.

5.1.2. Improve legal aid systems

In terms of the problems that female migrant workers cannot safeguard their own rights due to the limits in their capability and the deficiencies in legal channels, we suggest the government to set up free legal aid system and green right protecting channels, for instance, build legal aid stations and support service stations in labor unions, women's federations, courts and labor attribution institutions, so as to provide free and prompt legal consultancy and assistance services. Meanwhile, we also suggest the government to take this system into legislative process, and thus providing these female migrant workers an important guarantee to live in cities.

5.1.3. Increase investment in skills training

We suggest the government to appropriate a special fund for female migrant workers' regular skill training, and encourage all sectors of the society to build up various training funds for improving their skills and comprehensive quality, and set up training and employment channels at the same time and the trained workers have priority in employment.

5.1.4. Guarantee identical treatments

At first, it shall handle with the education of female migrant workers' children, namely, reducing the number of "left behind children" by allowing more migrant workers' children to study in cities and accept compulsory education. Then, it shall ensure their rights of enjoying normal vacations and holidays as the citizens in cities, including weekends, annual vacations, family leaves, maternity leaves and lactation leaves, etc. At last, it shall also guarantee the normal collection of pensions. When they are old, injured, or lose labor ability, the eligible ones shall be entitled to collect their pensions.

5.2 Increase the publicity of social care

The survey data explicitly shows that the society pay little attention to this group, therefore, we hope to increase the publicity of social care for female migrant workers by the positive and proper guidance of the media, and call for the whole society's awareness of the efforts and contributions that they have made for the social and economic development, thus regarding their rights and interests as the responsibilities and obligations of the society. Meanwhile, by this publicity, it may also improve their awareness of self-protection and right safeguard, so as to better promote the common progress of the whole society.

6. CONCLUSION

The living situations of female migrant workers shall be highly concerned and taken care by the society, for these problems not only relate to their own life quality, future and development, but also influence the stability of their family, the harmony of society, as well as the growth of their children. Therefore, to improve the living situation of female migrant workers is the inexorable demand for constructing a harmonious society, the objective requirement of urbanization, the important link for maintaining social stability, and also the mission for building social political civilization.

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