

The Construction of the Risk Factors Assessment Index System for the Mental Health of Rural Children

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ABSTRACT: *In the context of the accelerated transformation of social economies and urbanization, mental health issues among rural children have become increasingly prominent. This study aims to develop a risk factor assessment index system by examining risk factors across three levels: family, school, and society. At the family level, it encompasses parent-child relationships, economic status, educational approaches, and familial structural integrity; at the school level, it addresses resource allocation in education, academic pressure, cultural environment, and mental health education; at the societal level, it considers support systems, cultural perceptions, media and internet environments as well as economic development. The constructed index system is grounded in principles of scientific rigor, comprehensiveness, operability, and dynamism—rendering it both specific and holistic—and can be evaluated through diverse methodologies such as surveys and interviews. Consequently, collaboration among families, schools, and society is essential to safeguard the mental health of rural children by formulating intervention strategies while enhancing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to foster their healthy development.*

KEYWORDS— *Rural children; Mental health; Risk factor; Assessment*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of rapid development, the mental health issues faced by rural children have become increasingly prominent (Li et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2021; Wen & Lin, 2012). With the transformation of the socioeconomic landscape and the acceleration of urbanization, a significant influx of rural laborers has migrated to cities, leading to a growing population of left-behind children in rural areas. Amidst these changes, rural children encounter numerous unique challenges.

The separation from parents due to their employment away from home has become a norm for many rural children. The mental health issues of left-behind children have garnered substantial attention (He et al., 2012; Hu et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2015). During this critical phase of their development, parental absence results in a lack of companionship and affection, often leaving children feeling lonely and lost. These negative emotions are pervasive; despite their yearning for familial warmth, they must endure prolonged periods of waiting, exacerbating their anxiety due to the inability to receive timely comfort from their parents. Cognitively and behaviorally, although the advancement of the times has brought forth greater access to information and resources, rural areas still lag in the allocation of educational resources. Economic hardships restrict rural children's opportunities to access learning materials, gradually widening the gap between them and their urban counterparts, which can lead to feelings of inferiority. When faced with academic challenges, the lack of effective guidance and support further fosters anxiety and aversion to learning. Studies have indicated that students at a higher risk of anxiety often come from impoverished counties and families, including female students, middle schoolers, and those with lower academic performance (Liu et al., 2018). Moreover, in an era

of diverse information, the dissemination of negative content may impact rural children’s emotional management, resulting in behavioral issues. Interpersonally, modern society places increasing demands on communication skills. However, due to the relatively isolated environments in which rural children live, they lack rich social experiences and effective communication guidance. In social interactions, they often exhibit tension and unease, and some even develop social anxiety, making it challenging to adapt to the evolving demands of interpersonal communication in the contemporary world. In terms of values, the abundance of material goods and information explosion have created a backdrop where the backwardness of rural social environments limits children’s exposure to new experiences and concepts, leading to confusion about their futures. Additionally, some rural children who grow up in poverty may develop a strong utilitarian mindset, which contradicts the ideals of comprehensive development and healthy growth advocated by society. These interwoven psychological issues, if not addressed and resolved, can severely impede the healthy development and holistic growth of rural children in the new era, hindering their integration into modern society and posing potential concerns for social progress.

In light of this, this study aims to construct a scientific, comprehensive, and practical assessment index system for the risk factors affecting the mental health of rural children (see Figure 1). Theoretically, this will contribute to enriching and improving research in the field of child mental health. By analyzing the risk factors associated with the mental health of rural children, new perspectives and foundations for further understanding the mechanisms and developmental patterns of children’s mental health can be provided. A scientifically sound assessment index system will also serve as an effective tool and framework for subsequent empirical research, facilitating the advancement of child mental health studies. From a practical standpoint, accurately assessing the risk factors for rural children's mental health can provide targeted intervention measures and recommendations for educators, parents, and various sectors of society. By early identification and intervention of risk factors, the occurrence of mental health issues among rural children can be prevented, thereby promoting their mental well-being. Furthermore, it aids in optimizing the allocation of educational resources and improving the quality of mental health education in rural schools. Additionally, this has significant implications for building a harmonious rural society and promoting integrated urban-rural development.

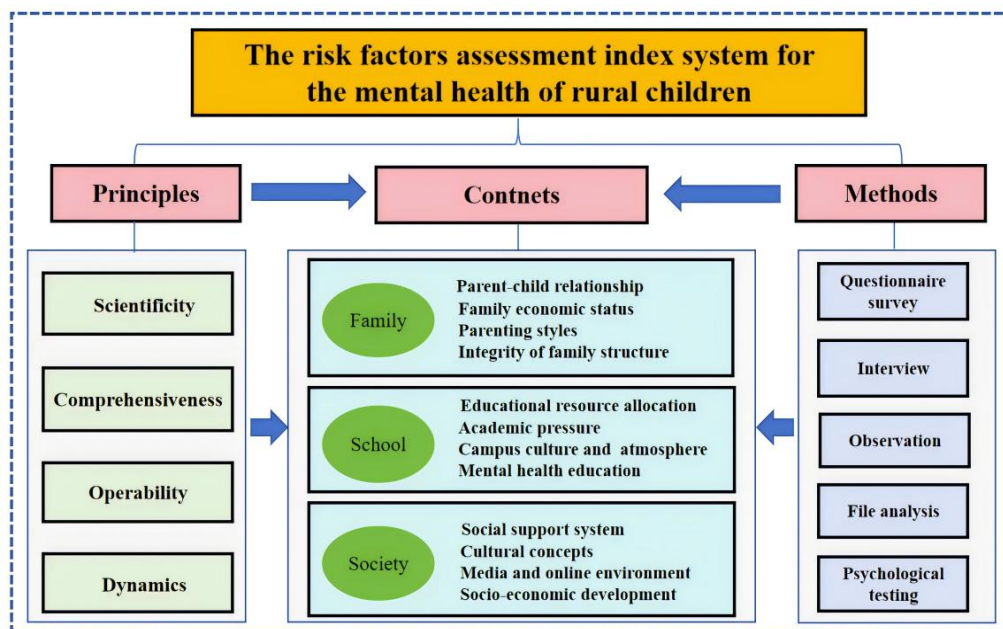


Figure 1. The risk factors assessment index system for the mental health of rural children

II. RISK FACTORS FOR MENTAL HEALTH OF RURAL CHILDREN

2.1. Family environment factors

2.1.1. Parent-child relationship

The parent-child relationship influences the mental health status of individuals, especially children (Morgan et al., 2012). In rural areas, many parents choose to work outside to improve their family's economic situation, resulting in children becoming left-behind children. The health issues of rural left-behind children cannot be ignored (Li et al., 2015). Left-behind children lack the company of their parents for a long time, and there is a serious shortage of close contact and emotional communication between parents and children. When they encounter problems during their growth, they cannot confide in their parents in time and obtain support and guidance, which makes them prone to negative emotions such as loneliness, helplessness, and anxiety. For example, when they are bullied at school or encounter difficulties in learning, with their parents not around, they can only face it alone. Over time, they may become timid and cowardly or develop a dislike for learning. In addition, even if one or both parents are at home, due to the limited education level of rural parents and being busy with making a living, it is often difficult for them to communicate effectively with their children. They may not understand the inner thoughts and needs of their children and only simply pay attention to their children's material life and academic performance. In communication, they may use a commanding and blaming way instead of listening and understanding. This will lead to children's resistance and unwillingness to communicate with their parents, thereby affecting the harmonious development of the parent-child relationship. Research shows that left-behind children raised by grandparents, or children with poor economic conditions, poor relationships, and low communication frequency with parents are more likely to encounter more and more serious loneliness (Jia & Tian, 2010).

2.1.2. Family economic situation

The economic situation of rural families is relatively difficult, and some families may have difficulty meeting the basic living and learning needs of their children. For example, children may lack sufficient nutrition, appropriate clothing, and necessary school supplies. This material scarcity easily leads to children developing inferiority complexes, making them feel uneasy and inferior when interacting with other children. They may feel inferior to others, thus affecting the establishment of self-awareness and self-esteem. In addition, the poor economic situation of the family will bring great pressure to parents. This pressure may lead to a tense family atmosphere. Parents may frequently quarrel due to economic problems, and children in such a family environment will feel fear and anxiety. Living in a tense family atmosphere for a long time, children are prone to emotional problems such as depression and irritability, and may also have negative perceptions of family and society.

2.1.3. Family parenting style

Negative parenting styles are prone to psychological and behavioral problems (Mak et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2022). Some rural parents may overindulge their children out of a compensatory psychology. They unconditionally meet their children's needs and overprotect them, preventing them from experiencing any setbacks and difficulties. This educational method leads to children lacking the ability to live independently and solve problems. Once they encounter setbacks, they are prone to psychological breakdowns and cannot bear pressure. At the same time, overindulgence may also make children self-centered, lacking compassion and a sense of responsibility, and encounter difficulties in interpersonal communication. While some other parents may adopt a strict punishment educational method. They are overly critical of their children's wrong behaviors and even use violent means such as scolding and beating. This educational method will make children develop

fear and rebellious psychology and damage the parent-child relationship. Children may become timid and lacking in confidence, or show rebelliousness and aggression, causing serious damage to their mental health.

2.1.4. Family structure integrity

In rural areas, due to various reasons such as divorce and widowhood, there is a certain proportion of single-parent families. Children in single-parent families often can only receive the care and education of one parent. The incomplete family structure will make children feel a sense of loss and uneasiness. They may have a feeling of being abandoned, doubt their own value, and are prone to psychological problems such as inferiority and loneliness. Research has found that children from single-parent families have a higher frequency of mental illnesses, especially those families where children lack a father throughout their lives (Moilanen & Rantakallio, 1988). In addition, many rural left-behind children are raised by grandparents. There are some drawbacks to intergenerational parenting. For example, the educational concepts of grandparents are relatively outdated. They often overindulge children, and are limited in knowledge level and energy, making it difficult to give children comprehensive education and guidance. At the same time, the generation gap between grandparents and grandchildren may lead to poor communication, and children's emotional needs cannot be met. In addition, intergenerational parenting may cause children to develop behaviors such as dependence and inertia, which is not conducive to their physical and mental health development (Falbo, 2014; Ko & Hank, 2014).

2.2. School environment factors

2.2.1. Education resource allocation

Rural schools often find it difficult to attract and retain high-quality teachers. The lack of excellent teachers leads to uneven teaching quality, and teachers may not be able to provide rural children with comprehensive and in-depth knowledge imparting and psychological guidance. For example, in terms of mental health education, the lack of professional teachers makes children unable to obtain professional help when they encounter psychological confusion. Moreover, the shortage of teachers may lead to heavy teaching tasks for each teacher, making it difficult for them to pay attention to the individual differences and psychological needs of each student. In addition, compared with urban schools, the teaching facilities of rural schools are relatively simple. The lack of modern teaching equipment, books and materials, and experimental equipment limits the learning experience and vision expansion of rural children. For example, the lack of multimedia teaching equipment may make teaching methods monotonous and unable to stimulate students' learning interests, thereby affecting their learning enthusiasm and confidence.

2.2.2. Academic pressure

Academic pressure is an important potential factor leading to mental health problems (Stear et al., 2023). High-intensity academic pressure will not only cause physical health problems but also have a significant impact on mental health (Dunne et al., 2010). At present, the curriculum settings of rural schools often lack rationality and overly focus on exam-oriented education. These curriculum contents may seem boring, and the teaching methods are mainly traditional indoctrination, resulting in rural children bearing huge pressure in the learning process and lacking space and fun for autonomous learning. Their learning motivation mostly comes from exam needs rather than a true love for knowledge. In the long run, they are prone to develop a dislike for learning. In the school environment, competition among students is inevitable. However, due to the relatively scarce resources of rural schools, competition often becomes more intense. Students bear huge psychological burdens in order to compete for limited enrollment opportunities and honors. This overly competitive atmosphere may lead to psychological problems such as anxiety and depression in rural children. At the same time, it will also have a negative impact on their interpersonal relationships, making them more withdrawn and selfish.

2.2.3. Campus culture and atmosphere

Perceived campus culture plays an important role in personal beliefs about mental health treatment (Chen et al., 2017). Rural schools may not pay enough attention to campus culture construction and lack rich and colorful campus cultural activities. Campus culture is an important soil for students' growth. It can cultivate students' interests, teamwork spirit, and innovation ability. Rural children may be restricted in their personality development and emotional expression due to the lack of opportunities to participate in various cultural activities. For example, the lack of activities in art, sports, and other aspects makes it impossible for rural children's talents to be displayed, which may affect their self-awareness and self-confidence. In addition, good teacher-student relationships and classmate relationships are crucial to children's physical and mental development (Hughes & Cavell, 1999; Zhao et al., 2021). However, in some rural schools, teachers may have insufficient communication with students due to heavy teaching tasks and other reasons, and the teacher-student relationship is relatively distant. There may also be phenomena such as bullying and exclusion among classmates, which will make rural children feel lonely, fearful, and uneasy. Living in such a campus atmosphere for a long time will seriously damage the mental health of rural children.

2.2.4. Mental health education

When the goals of mental health include effective school education and the goals of schools include the healthy growth of students, the integration of education and mental health will be promoted (Atkins et al., 2010). However, many rural schools do not offer specialized mental health education courses, or even if they do, they are often perfunctory and lack systematicness and pertinence. The lack of mental health education courses makes rural children unable to obtain systematic mental health knowledge and skill training, and they do not know how to deal with their own emotional problems and psychological pressures. In addition, rural schools generally lack professional psychological counseling and consulting service institutions and personnel. When rural children have psychological problems, they cannot obtain timely and effective intervention and treatment. Moreover, rural schools and teachers have insufficient understanding of mental health problems and may ignore students' psychological problems, leading to further deterioration of the problems.

2.3. Social environment factors

2.3.1. Social support system

Social support is regarded as one of the main factors predicting mental health (Bedaso et al., 2021; Harandi et al., 2017; Qi et al., 2020). Rural communities are often relatively weak in providing mental health services for children. Communities lack specialized mental health service institutions and professionals for children and cannot provide timely psychological support and counseling for rural children. Compared with urban communities, rural communities organize fewer children's activities, and children lack social and entertainment opportunities, which may lead to feelings of loneliness and social anxiety. In rural areas, neighborhood relationships should be an important source of social support. However, with the change of times, the traditional neighborhood mutual assistance model is gradually fading. The communication between some neighbors is reduced, and the care and attention for rural children are not as good as before. When rural children encounter problems, they may not be able to obtain effective help and support from neighbors.

2.3.2. Cultural concepts

Culture is closely related to psychology (Rathod et al., 2020; Robles-Ramamurthy et al., 2022). Some traditional concepts in rural areas may have a negative impact on children's mental health. For example, the concept of valuing sons over daughters may lead to unfair treatment of girls in families and society, affecting their self-esteem and confidence. There are also some traditional concepts that emphasize that children should

be obedient and compliant, suppressing children's personality development and autonomous consciousness, making them dare not express their true thoughts and feelings when facing problems. Compared with urban culture, rural culture has certain differences. In some cases, rural children may be discriminated against or misunderstood due to their cultural background. This cultural difference and discrimination may make them develop inferiority complexes, doubt their own identity and value, and thus affect their mental health.

2.3.3. Media and network environment

The media resources available in rural areas are relatively limited; however, some harmful media content can still adversely affect rural children. For instance, certain films and television programs may contain violence and horror, and rural children often lack the ability to discern such content, making them susceptible to its negative influence, which can lead to feelings of fear and anxiety. Additionally, some advertisements may induce rural children to develop incorrect consumption concepts and values. With the widespread use of the internet, rural children now have greater access to online content. However, due to a lack of effective supervision and guidance, some rural children may become addicted to online games, resulting in gaming addiction. This addiction not only impacts their academic performance and daily life (Polat & Topal, 2022; Sun et al., 2023) but may also trigger a range of psychological issues, such as difficulties in maintaining attention, significant emotional fluctuations, and declining social skills (Brunborg et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2017).

2.3.4. Social and economic development

There is an obvious connection between social and economic inequality and poor mental health status (Macintyre et al., 2018). The economic development of rural areas is relatively backward, and poverty problems still exist. Rural children from poor families may face problems such as difficult living conditions, insufficient nutrition, and lack of educational resources, all of which will have an adverse impact on their mental health. Compared with urban children, rural children have a large gap in material life and development opportunities. This gap may lead to psychological gaps and a sense of unfairness. In addition, there are relatively few employment opportunities in rural areas, and rural children may feel confused and worried about their future development prospects. They may worry that they cannot change their destiny through efforts. This uncertainty about the future will bring psychological pressure to them. At the same time, the imbalance of social and economic development may also affect the social cognition and values of rural children, making them have a negative psychological state.

III. PRINCIPLES FOR CONSTRUCTING THE EVALUATION INDEX SYSTEM

3.1. Principle of scientificity

The construction of the evaluation index system should be based on scientific psychological, educational, and sociological theories. Fully draw on domestic and foreign research results on children's mental health to ensure that the indicators can accurately reflect the essential characteristics and internal laws of rural children's mental health. For example, based on the theory of child development psychology, consider the psychological development tasks and characteristics of rural children at different ages, set corresponding evaluation indicators, and verify the validity and reliability of the indicators through empirical research. Methods such as questionnaires, interviews, and observations can be used to collect actual data on rural children's mental health and screen and optimize the indicators. At the same time, statistical methods are used to analyze the data to ensure that there is a reasonable correlation and independence between the indicators.

3.2. Principle of comprehensiveness

The evaluation index system should cover all aspects of rural children's mental health, including dimensions such as cognition, emotion, will, and behavior. Not only should we pay attention to children's

psychological problems and disorders, but also consider their psychological advantages and potentials. For example, in addition to evaluating negative emotions such as anxiety and depression, we should also pay attention to positive psychological qualities such as children's self-esteem, self-confidence, and optimism. We should comprehensively consider various factors affecting rural children's mental health, such as family environment, school environment, and social environment. Analyze risk factors from multiple angles to avoid one-sidedness and limitations. For example, factors such as parent-child relationship, family economic situation, and family education style in the family environment should all be included in the evaluation index system; aspects such as teaching staff, teaching facilities, and campus culture in the school environment cannot be ignored; social support systems, cultural concepts, media and network environments in the social environment also need to be considered.

3.3. Principle of operability

Evaluation indicators should have clear definitions and connotations and be easy to understand and measure. Avoid using vague and abstract concepts to ensure that different evaluators can reach a consistent understanding and judgment when using the indicators. For example, for the indicator of parent-child relationship, it can be further defined as specific measurable contents such as parent-child communication frequency and parent-child interaction quality. Moreover, the selected evaluation methods should be simple and easy to implement and can be applied in rural areas. Considering the resource conditions and actual situation in rural areas, evaluation methods with low cost and high efficiency should be adopted as much as possible. For example, questionnaires can be conducted using existing resources in schools, or data can be collected through training rural teachers to conduct simple observations and interviews.

3.4. Principle of dynamics

The mental health status of rural children is affected by changes in time and environment. Therefore, the evaluation index system should also have dynamic characteristics. It is particularly important to timely track and reflect the impact of factors such as rural social and economic development and educational reform on children's mental health, which requires timely adjustment and update of the content of evaluation indicators. For example, with the popularization of the Internet in rural areas, the impact of the Internet on children's mental health is gradually increasing. Therefore, evaluation indicators related to Internet use should be added. In addition, there are significant individual differences among rural children. The evaluation index system should have the ability to adapt to these differences. On the basis of ensuring the stability of the overall framework, personalized evaluation indicators or weights should be set for children of different ages, genders, and family backgrounds to improve the accuracy and pertinence of the evaluation. For example, for left-behind children and non-left-behind children, different weights can be set on parent-child relationship-related indicators to better reflect their differences in this aspect.

IV. Assessment Indicator System Content

4.1. Family

4.1.1. Parent-child relationship

4.1.1.1. Parental Presence and Communication

First, the amount of time spent together. Record the actual number of days each year that parents spend at home with their children, as well as the average number of hours per week. For instance, if a child spends less than a month a year with their parents, it may adversely affect the parent-child relationship and the child's mental health. Next, the frequency of communication. Track the number of times parents engage in deep conversations with their children each week (e.g., discussing school life, emotional feelings). Frequent and in-

depth communication helps strengthen parent-child relationships, while infrequent communication may leave children's emotional needs unmet. Finally, assess the quality of communication. Evaluate the parents' attitudes, methods, and effectiveness during conversations with their children. For example, do parents listen patiently to their children's thoughts? Do they provide positive feedback and support, or are they overly critical?

4.1.1.2. Emotional support and understanding

First, emotional expression is a crucial indicator for evaluating the parent-child relationship. It is essential to observe whether parents and children express emotions such as love, care, and encouragement in daily life. Children who experience rich emotional expression in the family often feel greater security and confidence. Secondly, the degree of understanding is also a key factor. Parents' understanding of their children can be assessed through the children's subjective feelings and actual behaviors. For example, when children face difficulties, are parents able to consider issues from the child's perspective and provide appropriate advice and support? This is particularly important.

4.1.2. Family economic status

4.1.2.1. Income level and stability

First, determine the family's annual income. Clarify the total annual income amount of the family and compare it with the local rural average income level. Low income may limit children's material living standards and educational resources. Next, assess the diversity of income sources. Investigate the types of income sources for the family, such as agricultural income, labor income, and side income. A single income source may make family finances more vulnerable to external factors, increasing financial pressure. Finally, analyze the stability of income. Examine fluctuations in family income over different years to identify if there are frequent reductions or interruptions. Unstable income can lead to anxiety within the family, adversely affecting children's mental health.

4.1.2.2. Material living conditions

First, the living environment is an important factor in evaluating children's mental health. Assess the area, quality, and sanitary conditions of the family's housing. Poor living conditions can negatively impact the physical and mental health and learning efficiency of rural children. Next, the nutritional status of the diet is also crucial. Observing the types of food rural children consume daily and the balance of their nutrition is vital. Malnutrition can lead to stunted physical development, which in turn affects their mental state and cognitive development. Finally, the availability of learning supplies and resources is equally important. Statistics should include the quantity and quality of learning supplies that rural children possess, as well as the ease of accessing extracurricular learning resources (e.g., books, internet devices). A lack of necessary learning supplies and resources may lead to feelings of frustration in rural children, negatively impacting their self-esteem and motivation to learn.

4.1.3. Parenting styles

4.1.3.1. Types of parenting styles

First, the democratic style. Observe whether parents respect their children's opinions and choices, encouraging them to think independently and make their own decisions. Children raised in democratic households typically have higher self-esteem and confidence. Next, authoritarian style. Assess whether parents impose overly strict demands on their children, controlling their behavior and thoughts with little space for autonomy. Authoritarian parenting can lead to rebelliousness or feelings of inferiority in children. Next, the permissive style. Examine whether parents are overly indulgent with their children, lacking necessary

constraints and guidance. Permissive parenting may cause children to lack a sense of rules and self-discipline, making it difficult for them to cope with challenges. Finally, the indulgent style. Understand whether parents excessively pamper their children, unconditionally fulfilling their requests. Indulgent parenting may make children selfish, dependent, and lacking in problem-solving skills.

4.1.3.2. Reward and punishment system

Analyze how parents reward their children. For instance, do they use material rewards or psychological incentives, and are the rewards commensurate with the child's actual performance? Appropriate rewards can enhance a child's motivation and confidence, while excessive material rewards may distort a child's values. Observe how parents punish their children when mistakes occur, noting whether there are inappropriate behaviors such as corporal punishment or scolding. Inappropriate punishment can harm a child's self-esteem and lead to fear and anxiety.

4.1.4. Integrity of family structure

4.1.4.1. Family member composition

Determine whether both parents are alive and living together. A family structure with both parents tends to be more complete and beneficial for a child's mental health. In the case of a single-parent family, record the situation of the absent parent (father or mother) and the parenting capabilities and adjustment of the single parent. Children in single-parent families may face emotional deficiencies and psychological pressures. Additionally, statistics on the proportion of grandparents raising children should be collected to evaluate how the educational concepts, energy, and capabilities of grandparents affect children's mental health. Grandparent-led families may encounter educational gaps and communication barriers.

4.1.4.2. Family functioning

Family functionality affects children's mental health (Barnett & Hunter, 2012; Pan et al., 2021). Therefore, it is essential to assess whether the family provides a warm, caring, and supportive emotional atmosphere, and whether children feel a sense of security and belonging within the family. Analyze the family's role in fostering good morals, behavior habits, and learning abilities in children. A well-functioning family education can help children develop healthy psychology and sound personalities. Evaluate whether the family can meet children's basic living and learning needs and whether financial difficulties negatively impact the family's functionality. Insufficient economic functionality may lead to feelings of inferiority and anxiety in children.

4.2. School

4.2.1. Educational resource allocation

4.2.1.1. Teacher quality

Statistical data on the educational qualifications of school teachers (e.g., the proportion of teachers with diplomas, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, or higher) and their professional backgrounds (e.g., whether they graduated from teacher training or psychology programs) is crucial. A higher proportion of teachers with advanced degrees and relevant professional backgrounds may positively impact the mental health of rural children. Assess the frequency and quality of training and continuing education opportunities provided for teachers. For example, the number of professional training sessions attended each year and whether the training content covers aspects of children's mental health. The more training opportunities teachers have, the stronger their educational and psychological counseling abilities may become. Calculate the student-teacher ratio to

understand the average number of students each teacher is responsible for. A high student-teacher ratio may prevent teachers from adequately addressing each student's psychological needs.

4.2.1.2. Teaching facilities

Evaluate the completeness of school facilities, such as classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and sports fields. For instance, assess classroom lighting and ventilation, the advanced nature of laboratory equipment, the quantity and frequency of library book updates, and the types and quantities of sports equipment. Good teaching facilities help provide a favorable learning environment for rural children, promoting their physical and mental health. Additionally, investigate the availability of information technology teaching equipment (e.g., computers, multimedia teaching devices, internet access) in schools. The richness of information technology resources can affect the diversity of teaching methods and children's access to knowledge, thus impacting their mental health.

4.2.2. Academic pressure

4.2.2.1. Curriculum load

Analyze the number of courses offered by the school and the difficulty level of the curriculum. An excessive number of courses or overly difficult material may cause rural children to feel overwhelmed by academic pressure, leading to anxiety and aversion to learning. Record the average time students spend completing homework daily and the total volume of homework. An excessive workload or lengthy completion times may increase students' academic burdens, affecting their rest and recreational time, which is detrimental to their mental health. Understand the proportion of rural children participating in extracurricular tutoring and the time dedicated to it. Excessive tutoring may further exacerbate academic pressure.

4.2.2.2. Examination pressure

First, record the number of exams organized by the school, including weekly tests, monthly tests, and Mid-term and final exams. Frequent examinations may keep students in a state of tension, increasing psychological pressure. Second, pay attention to how exam results are ranked and disclosed. Assess whether the school announces students' exam rankings, and the range and method of these announcements. Public rankings may lead to excessive competition among students, imposing a psychological burden on those who do not perform well. Finally, it is also crucial to understand parents' expectations for their children's exam performance. Excessive expectations may place significant psychological pressure on children, affecting their mental health and academic performance.

4.2.3. Campus culture and atmosphere

4.2.3.1. Cultural activities on campus

Statistical data on the types of cultural activities organized by the school, such as art competitions, calligraphy and painting exhibitions, and poetry recitations, are essential. A rich and diverse range of cultural activities helps cultivate rural children's interests and talents, promoting their personal development and mental health. Assess the proportion and enthusiasm of student participation in campus cultural activities. High participation indicates a strong campus cultural atmosphere, enhancing students' sense of belonging and teamwork. Additionally, evaluate the organization, professionalism, and influence of campus cultural activities. High-quality cultural activities can enhance students' aesthetic abilities and cultural literacy, positively impacting their mental health.

4.2.3.2. Teacher-student relationships and peer relationship

The intimacy of teacher-student relationships can be measured through students' subjective evaluations and actual behaviors. For example, whether students are willing to communicate with teachers and whether teachers care about students' lives and learning. A good teacher-student relationship can provide emotional support and psychological security for students. Observe the interactions between students, whether bullying occurs, and assess the harmony of peer relationships. Harmonious peer relationships help cultivate students' social skills and cooperation, reducing feelings of loneliness and anxiety. Additionally, understand students' satisfaction with the overall campus atmosphere (including the learning atmosphere, living environment, etc.). A high level of satisfaction with the campus atmosphere can lead to a pleasant mood, allowing students to engage positively in learning and life.

4.2.4. Mental health education

4.2.4.1. Mental health curriculum

Determine whether the school offers specialized mental health education courses, as well as the schedule and frequency of these courses. The existence and adequacy of such courses directly relate to rural children's acquisition of mental health knowledge and the development of psychological adjustment skills. Assess whether the content of mental health education courses meets the actual needs of rural children and whether the teaching materials are relevant and practical. Engaging, life-related course content and materials can enhance students' interest and effectiveness in learning.

4.2.4.2. Psychological counseling and support service

First, it is crucial to count the number and qualifications of professional psychological counseling teachers at the school. The presence of qualified psychological counselors can provide timely and effective psychological support and assistance to rural children. Second, examine the facilities and environment of the school counseling office as an important aspect of evaluation. A warm, comfortable, and well-equipped counseling room can help students relax and engage more effectively in psychological consultations. Additionally, it is important to understand whether the school has established a psychological crisis intervention mechanism and how comprehensive and effective this mechanism is. An effective psychological crisis intervention mechanism can provide timely intervention for students experiencing serious psychological issues, thereby preventing tragic outcomes.

4.3. Society

4.3.1. Social support system

4.3.1.1. Community services

When evaluating daycare services for children in rural communities, it is essential to assess the safety of facilities and environments, the rationality of spatial layouts, and sanitary conditions. Additionally, consideration should be given to the qualifications of teaching staff, teacher-student ratios, and training programs. The diversity, appropriateness, and engagement level of curricula and activities also warrant attention. Furthermore, the robustness of management systems and service quality frameworks must not be overlooked; this includes evaluating the attitudes and sense of responsibility exhibited by personnel as well as gauging parental and child satisfaction. In terms of community extracurricular tutoring resources, an examination should encompass types offered, coverage areas, accessibility issues, quality assurance measures for teaching staff stability, along with resource integration efficiency. For community interest groups and club activities aimed at children's development needs—both in type variety and quantity—it is crucial to ensure a

balanced approach that fosters growth. Consideration should also extend to forms of activity organization including frequency levels, qualitative aspects thereof, degrees of participation achieved by children during these events as well as support mechanisms such as venue availability, equipment provision funds allocation alongside dedicated organizational coordination.

4.3.1.2. Participation of social organization

Evaluate the extent to which various charitable organizations conduct activities focused on caring for children's mental health in rural areas, including the number of activities, their content, and coverage. For instance, some organizations may offer psychological counseling courses or donate books and school supplies. Rich and targeted activities are beneficial for rural children's mental health; sparse activities may pose a risk factor. Additionally, gather statistics on the number of volunteers participating in mental health services for rural children, the duration of their service, and its effectiveness. Active participation by volunteers can provide more care and support for children; insufficient volunteers or poor service quality may negatively impact children's mental health.

4.3.2. Cultural concepts

4.3.2.1. Traditional concepts

Observe whether there are prevalent notions of gender discrimination, such as the preference for boys over girls, and the specific ways this manifests in families and society concerning children (especially girls), such as educational opportunities and resource allocation. Severe gender discrimination may lead to feelings of inferiority and anxiety among girls. Analyze the influence of familial concepts on rural children, such as expectations, pressures, and the sense of family honor, and their psychological effects. An excessive emphasis on family concepts may impose a heavy psychological burden on children. Furthermore, examine the extent to which rural parents and society value education and whether misconceptions like the futility of studying exist. Misguided educational beliefs can affect children's motivation to learn and self-perception, thereby impacting their mental health.

4.3.2.2. Cultural activities and customs

Understand the participation of rural children in local cultural activities (e.g., folk festivals, folk art performances), including frequency, degree of involvement, and feelings about these activities. Active participation in cultural events helps children inherit culture and enhances their sense of cultural identity and pride, promoting their mental health; low participation may lead to a lack of cultural belonging. Additionally, evaluate the psychological impact of certain traditional cultural customs (e.g., weddings, funerals, rituals) on rural children, considering whether some feudal superstitions or unreasonable aspects lead to fear or confusion.

4.3.3. Media and online environment

4.3.3.1. Media content exposure

Analyze the types of television programs rural children watch, the duration of viewing, and the quality of the program content. Excessive exposure to violent, horror, or inappropriate media may negatively impact children's psychology, leading to fear, anxiety, or maladaptive behaviors. Investigate how rural children use the internet to obtain information, including sources, content, and frequency. Harmful online information (e.g., rumors, inappropriate content) may mislead children and affect their values and mental health. Moreover, assess rural children's use of social media (e.g., WeChat, QQ), including purposes, duration, and quality of social relationships. Excessive indulgence in social media or experiencing online bullying may lead to social anxiety, depression, and other psychological issues.

4.3.3.2. Media and internet literacy

Through tests or surveys, understand rural children's ability to discern media and online information. Poor discernment skills may make children susceptible to negative information, increasing mental health risks. Assess rural children's awareness of online safety, such as knowledge of how to protect personal privacy and avoid online scams. A lack of awareness regarding internet safety may expose children to harm in the online environment, affecting their mental health.

4.3.4. Socio-economic development

4.3.4.1. Family economic status

Collect statistics on the annual income of rural families and compare it with the local average. Low-income families may struggle to provide children with good living conditions, educational resources, and medical care, increasing children's psychological stress. Understand whether families are in poverty and the stability of their escape from poverty. Families that have been in long-term poverty or fall back into poverty after escaping may present more psychological challenges for children, such as feelings of inferiority and anxiety. Additionally, assess, through the subjective feelings of children and parents, the impact of family economic pressure on children's mental health. Strong feelings of economic pressure may lead to psychological burdens and unease among children.

4.3.4.2. Regional economic development level

Examine the state of infrastructure development in rural areas, such as transportation, water supply, electricity, and communication. Inadequate infrastructure may limit rural children's horizons and development opportunities, indirectly impacting their mental health. Analyze local employment opportunities and industry development to determine whether they can provide stable income sources for rural families. A lack of employment opportunities and slow industrial development may result in economic hardships for families, subsequently affecting children's mental health. Furthermore, assess local government investment in rural education, including school construction, teacher training, and educational equipment procurement. Insufficient investment in educational resources may impact the quality of education and the mental health development of rural children.

V. EVALUATION METHODS AND TOOLS

5.1. Questionnaire survey

First, general mental health questionnaires. Validated general mental health questionnaires such as the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) and the Symptom Checklist 90 (SCL-90) can be used. These questionnaires cover multiple aspects of psychological problems and symptoms and can reflect children's mental health status more comprehensively. For example, through the CBCL, we can understand the performance of rural children in aspects such as social skills, behavioral problems, and emotional problems. Secondly, specific risk factor questionnaires. According to the characteristics of rural children, specific risk factor questionnaires are designed. For example, questionnaires on the feelings of parent-child separation for left-behind children and questionnaires on the perception of family economic pressure. These questionnaires can more targetedly assess the impact of specific risk factors on the mental health of rural children.

5.2. Interview

First, individual interviews. Conduct one-on-one interviews with rural children to understand their inner feelings, life experiences, and difficulties they face. Interviewers can use open-ended questions to encourage

children to freely express their thoughts and emotions. For example, ask children questions such as "What is the happiest thing for you?" and "What difficulties have you encountered at school?" to deeply understand their psychological states. Secondly, parent interviews. Conduct interviews with the parents of rural children to understand the impact of family environment and educational methods on children's mental health. Questions can be asked about aspects such as parent-child relationship, family economic status, and family educational methods, as well as their degree of concern for their children's mental health. Finally, teacher interviews. Conduct interviews with the teachers of rural children to understand the impact of school environment and academic pressure on children's mental health. Teachers can provide information about students' performance at school, learning pressure, and classmate relationships, which is helpful for comprehensively assessing the mental health risk factors of rural children.

5.3. Observation

First, classroom observation. Observe the performance of rural children in the classroom, including attention, participation, and emotional state. For example, observe whether children are easily distracted, whether they actively participate in classroom discussions, and whether they have emotional manifestations such as anxiety or depression. Secondly, campus activity observation. Observe the performance of rural children in campus activities such as sports activities, art performances, and club activities. Understand their social skills, interests, and emotional regulation abilities. Finally, family observation. If possible, observe the family environment of rural children to understand aspects such as family atmosphere, parent-child interaction, and family rules, and assess the impact of family environment on children's mental health.

5.4. File analysis

First, academic achievement files. Analyze the academic achievement files of rural children to understand their learning situation and academic pressure. Children with large fluctuations in grades and learning difficulties may face higher psychological pressure. Secondly, health records. Consult the health records of rural children to understand their physical conditions and past medical histories. Physical diseases may have an impact on children's mental health. For example, children with long-term illnesses may have emotional problems such as anxiety and depression. Finally, school records. Check school records such as attendance records and disciplinary records. Children with frequent absences and disciplinary issues may have psychological problems or family environment problems and need further assessment.

5.5. Psychological testing

First, intelligence testing. Conduct intelligence tests on rural children to understand their cognitive abilities and development levels. Children with lower intelligence levels may face more learning difficulties and psychological pressure. Secondly, personality testing. Use personality testing tools such as the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire to understand the personality characteristics of rural children. Different personality types may have different sensitivities to mental health risk factors. For example, children with introverted personalities may be more prone to social anxiety and other problems. Finally, emotional regulation testing: Through emotional regulation testing, assess the emotional regulation abilities of rural children. Children with poor emotional regulation abilities may be more easily affected by external factors and have emotional problems.

When employing these methods and tools, several critical considerations must be addressed: First, the selection of appropriate methods and tools is paramount. It is essential to choose evaluation techniques that align with the characteristics of rural children and the specific objectives of the assessment. Each method possesses distinct advantages and limitations that warrant comprehensive consideration. Second, it is imperative to provide training for evaluators. Personnel involved in the evaluation process should receive adequate training to ensure they are proficient in utilizing these methods and tools effectively while accurately collecting and

analyzing data. Third, safeguarding children's privacy is crucial; during the evaluation process, measures must be taken to protect rural children's personal information from unauthorized disclosure. Finally, a multimethod approach should be adopted; relying solely on one method may introduce limitations; thus, integrating multiple methodologies can enhance both the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the evaluation.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study establishes an assessment index system for the risk factors affecting the mental health of rural children, highlighting the interactive influence of various factors from the family, school, and social contexts. At the family level, factors such as parent-child relationships, economic status, and educational approaches are considered. The school level encompasses aspects like the allocation of educational resources, academic pressure, campus cultural atmosphere, and mental health education. On the social level, issues related to support systems, cultural perceptions, media and online environments, and economic development disparities are addressed. Based on these findings, it is crucial for families, schools, and society to form a powerful collaborative effort to collectively address the mental health challenges faced by rural children. Targeted intervention measures should be developed, and monitoring and evaluation processes should be strengthened and continuously refined, thereby providing robust support for the mental health of rural children and facilitating their healthy development.

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