

## Social emotions of migrant workers and their demographic differences

Guifang Fu<sup>1\*</sup>, Jiaheng Ou<sup>1</sup>, Xiaolin Wu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Applied Psychology, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Canton, China

<sup>2</sup> School of Finance, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Canton, China

*\*Corresponding Author*

### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the basic situation of migrant workers' social emotions and its demographic differences. A total of 434 migrant workers from Guangdong Province in China were assessed both online and offline with the social emotions scale. The results show that: (1) The social emotions of most migrant workers are positive. (2) The social emotions of migrant workers are different because of the number of their children, their birth years and education level. (3) In addition their social emotion is related to their monthly income, occupation and working years in cities. The results of this study provide the basic situation and differences of Chinese migrant workers' social sentiment, supporting the mental service for migrant worker, having essential meaning of theory and practice.

**KEY WORDS:** social emotions; migrant workers, demographic differences, mental service

### I. INTRODUCTION

Migrant workers are a special group emerged during the course of the reform and opening up in China. Migrant workers represent original farmers who left the countryside to seek jobs in strange cities. Migrant workers have increased to one fifth of total population, as one of integral components of China's cities, and become more and more influential. According to the data published by National Bureau of Statistics in 30 April, 2021, there are around 286 million migrant workers in China by 2020. Since 1978, not only have migrant workers made tremendous contribution to rural construction, but also they have become major forces behind the development of cities' modernization. Especially the increasing new generation of migrant workers, who gradually exceed the old generation by the advantages of age and education, is the most numerous and potent part of migrant worker group, further promoting economic and society development.

Migrant workers who were born in rural area, in the course of transforming from farmers into citizens, will confront hindrances from all aspects, including institutional barriers from household registration system, problems about income gap and the high cost of living. Sometimes they might have conflicts with original citizens, or even being discriminated. Research has shown that the main cause of difficulty in social integration is intergroup bias from out-group. When there are significant differences between in-group and out-group, in-group members have more prejudice toward out-group, which will be more apparent given two opposing groups. Provided that the two groups are rivals, the homogenization effect will be intensified, leading members' negative intergroup bias. Researchers also have found out that migrant workers' urban identity and collective self-esteem will affect their perspective on urban groups. Migrant workers are faced with double pressure, physically and mentally, which will naturally cause mutual bias between migrant workers and local citizens. It is un conducive to society harmony and city development. Researches on migrant workers' social psychology like social emotions and collective self-esteem are still rare. Thus this study seeks to survey the basic situation of migrant workers' social emotions and analyze its demographic differences. Social emotions are a sort of subjective mental experience and psychological feel, produced by the whole social psychology of individuals.

Individuals experience and express their social emotion in their long-term social interaction. Social emotions are an important segment of social psychology, which mean social emotions of migrant workers have a prominent effect on social psychology of migrant workers, capable to modify and control migrant workers' behavior. Regarding the theoretical consequence of this study, we contribute our bit to the development of social emotions theory, and accelerate the integration of migrant workers into cities by data support, offering reference for society to carry out psychological services for migrant workers.

## II. METHOD

**Participants:** All participants were migrant workers from cities in Guangdong Province. The sample consisted of 434 migrant workers, of whom 228 were women. 98 participants were only children. 98 individuals have no child, 111 individuals have one child, 94 individuals have two children and 11 individuals have three children. 222 people born in the 1990s, 90 people born in the 1980s, 84 people born in the 1970s and 36 people born in the 1960s; There were 170 undergraduate students and 32 graduate students, with technical secondary school and below accounting for nearly 50%.

**Measures:** To assess social emotions migrant workers, participants completed Zhiliang Du (2018) social emotions scale. The 3-item scale assesses general emotions, life emotions and work emotions. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1(very good) to 5(very bad). Positive items were reverse coded such that higher scores indicated higher levels of social emotions ( $\alpha=.733$ )

For the purpose of surveying the specific emotional states of migrant workers, a multiple choice question “How do you often feel about your emotion?” was asked, in order to further understand the real social emotional states of migrant workers.

Descriptive analysis and difference test were conducted using the SPSS 22.0 version program.

## III. RESULTS

**Basic situation of migrant workers’ social emotions :**The mean of social emotions is 10.39, and standard deviation is 1.62, which shows that their positive social emotions are at a higher level. The score of social emotion scale ranges from 3 points to 5 points. Higher scores stand for higher levels of social emotions. Results of this study indicated that migrant workers are able to develop good social emotions in the process of achieving their self-worth in cities, performing positively in their life and work. The details of migrant workers’ specific social emotions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Status of migrant workers’ social emotions

Emotions	n	%
Irritable	69	15.90
Cheerful	194	44.70
Worried	89	20.50
Enthusiastic	156	35.90
Confused	77	17.70
Active	161	37.10
Nervous	62	14.30
Grateful	124	28.60
Depressed	28	6.50
Anxious	81	18.70

On account of Table 1, we can generally say that the social emotions of migrant workers are mostly positive emotions, with the high proportion of “Cheerful”, “Enthusiastic”, “Active” and “Grateful”. However, there are negative emotions in migrant worker groups. The slightly high proportion of “Worried”, “Nervous” and “Anxious” is worth our attention.

**Comparative analysis on the social emotions difference of migrant workers :**Difference test and analysis of variance were utilized to analyze migrant workers’ social emotions difference of gender, number of children, birth year, education level, monthly income, occupation and working years in cities (Table 2).

**Table 2. (continued)**Comparative analysis on the social emotions  
difference of migrant workers

Variables	M±SD	t Value (F Value)	p
<b>Monthly income</b>			
1k-3k(N=82)	10.38±1.58		
3k-5k(N=162)	10.44±1.69		
5k-7k(N=108)	10.12±1.57		
7k-9k(N=41)	10.73±1.64	2.679*	0.015
9k-11k(N=24)	10.71±1.30		
11k-15k(N=15)	10.80±1.01		
16k-20k(N=2)	7.00±0.000		
<b>Occupation</b>			
Public institution(N=54)	10.76±1.52		
Civil servants	10.58±2.68		
Businessmen(N=23)	9.74±1.96		
Company employees(N=151)	10.59±1.37		
Drivers(N=10)	9.90±1.52	4.987**	0.000
Workers(N=110)	9.85±1.43		
Servant (N=12)	11.08±1.51		
Service workers(N=52)	10.96±1.73		
Technical staff(N=10)	9.10±2.23		
<b>Working years in cities</b>			
6 months or less(N=39)	11.03±1.39		
6 months to 1 year(N=68)	10.26±1.64		
1-2 years(N=78)	10.71±1.50	3.166**	0.008
2-3 years(N=52)	10.23±1.55		
3-5 years(N=42)	10.62±1.71		
5 years or more(N=155)	10.11±1.65		

Note: \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01

The study shows significant social emotions difference of gender, number of children, birth year, education level, monthly income, occupation and working years in cities. Social emotions of female migrant workers are higher than males. The number of children is correlated with social emotions, and migrant workers without child have highest social emotion. The new generation of migrant workers has better social emotions than the old generation. “Primary school and below” and “Graduate and above” have the best social emotions, and “Secondary vocational school” gets the worst. The social emotions of occupations in the national system such as

"public institutions" and "civil servants" are higher than those in non-national systems such as "company employees", "workers" and "service workers", and the social emotional level of "workers" is the lowest.

#### **IV. DISCUSSION**

Social emotions of migrant workers are associated with society environment of the country. Since the 18th and 19th National Congress, the government have paid more attention to people's livelihood, sparing no efforts to let fruits of the reform and opening up benefit as much people as it can. Migrant workers, as an important part, have their income and living standard improved. Cities are completing management to enhance social security so that migrant workers can better enjoy the public services. At the same time, vocational training sponsored by the government is allowing more and more migrant workers to settle in cities. That is the reason why the social emotions of migrant workers are mostly positive emotions. However, as a developing country in the primary stage of socialism with only decades of history, we're still confronted with considerable economic, political and social challenges, rising prices and social justice, for instance. Migrant workers also suffer from high pressures, vast expense of housing and medicine, plus the insufficiency of social integration. Consequentially, they will have negative social emotions.

Social emotions of migrant workers change with the number of their offspring, in descending order of social emotions, no child, two children, three children and one child. For migrant worker groups, who originally have narrow social interaction, children would be a chance to amplify their social support levels. On the contrary, having more children means having more burdens of living and education, which will lower their sense of gain. Overall, the more children they have, the stronger urban identity and collective self-esteem they get. The author thinks that as the number of children grew, as a specific familiar factor in cities, migrant workers' connection with cities and the whole group will increase as well. In this way, migrant workers' sense of belonging, urban identity and collective self-esteem in cities can be strengthened. Generally speaking, the new generation of migrant workers has more sense of gain than the old generation, yet the old generation's urban identity and collective self-esteem are stronger. Compared to the old generation of migrant workers, the new generation has higher degrees and higher work expectations, and pursues more creature comforts and spiritual enjoyment, but gets less tolerance of working. As a consequence, they get higher income and less family burdens, which give them more sense of gain. Nevertheless, the old generation of migrant workers has worked in urban area for a much longer time, with more comprehension and sentiment to cities, thus having stronger sense of belonging and collective self-esteem in groups.

Our study shows that social emotions of migrant workers are affected by education. The higher education they get, the more sense of gain they have. Higher education indicates that one gets better capability and skills to earn the income for satisfying material and spiritual needs, which is positively correlated with the ability to adjust one's mood and stronger sense of gain. There are distinct gender differences in social emotions of migrant workers, with social emotions of female migrant workers higher than males. It might be positively correlated with the fact that females tend to express their feelings more, who are grateful and willing to vent their emotions, while males, with more family stress and higher career expectation, are not so accustomed to expressing emotions if they can't fulfill their expectation.

It is necessary to enhance psychological service for migrant workers and build up their positive emotions in the phase of city development. On one hand, mental health services ought to be included in basic public service system. A realistic mental health service system should be set up and improved in order to expand the service cover by including migrant workers. And keep practicing service skills for addressing mental problems of migrant workers. On the other hand, all walks of life should reinforce mental health education, attaching great importance to the development of mental health, and increase mental health awareness and literacy in psychology of migrant workers. Step by step, build up platform, system, professional team and key population services for mental health in urban area, especially in workforce and community. Cultivate corresponding social organizations to better serve migrant workers by satisfying their psychological need and stabilizing their mood.

Offices and enterprises are supposed to meet mental demand of their employees based on their various need, for example, setting up psychological service stations, offering psychological services to migrant workers, intensifying the publicity and education of mental health, and periodically carrying out employee activities to settle their negative emotions. At the same time, as settlements of most migrant workers, community and streets should also set up psychological service stations relying on primary departments like family service department. Relevant professionals like therapists and social workers need to be staffed in social organizations so as to play their part in coordinating volunteers, proceeding the publicity and education of mental health to the residents and teaching them the knowledge to manage their emotions. There also can be psychological services specially for migrant workers to strengthen their self-awareness and self-efficacy.

Everyone needs counseling and psychiatric help whether you are normal people or patients with mental illness. Living in constantly developing cities, many migrant workers have more or less social maladjustment, which cause them assorted psychological disorder. It is because of the high pace of life and the stressful work that migrant workers couldn't spare themselves from tiring work and life to take care of their inner self. It is necessary for community and workplaces to launch counseling services as psychological support, which will be an affordable and feasible method to adjust social psychology of migrant workers. To genuinely solve mental problems of migrant workers by conducting positive psychological crisis intervention and assistance, social organizations and social workers should play their roles in offering sustainable psychological services depending on local institutions and volunteer organizations. Corporations and community can improve their cooperation with colleges in the way of signing the agreement to provide talents in psychology and social work, which can also bring mutual benefit. A group of professionals can be organized together to offer professional psychological services for the people. There are only a few members of the Communist Party of China in the migrant worker group. Most of migrant workers lack abundant understanding to the Communist Party, still political status has an important effect on migrant workers. Therefore, publicity of the good style and purpose of our party should be intensified to increase political consciousness of migrant workers. And encourage migrant workers to join our party as a positive way of improving social support, urban identity, collective self-esteem and sense of gain.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to explore the basic situation of migrant workers' social emotions and its demographic differences. A total of 434 migrant workers from Guangdong Province in China were assessed both online and offline with the social emotions scale. The results show that: (1) The social emotions of most migrant workers are positive. (2) The social emotions of migrant workers are different because of the number of their children, their birth years and education level. (3) In addition their social emotion is related to their monthly income, occupation and working years in cities. The results of this study provide the basic situation and differences of Chinese migrant workers' social sentiment, supporting the mental service for migrant worker, having essential meaning of theory and practice. Although this study utilized the investigation method to examine social emotions of migrant workers, certain limitations must be considered when interpreting the results. At first, participants were only from Guangdong Province. A larger number of participants from a wider range can increase certain accuracy. Secondly, experiments are required to confirm causality. Thus, further studies can start from these aspects. In addition, there must be other variables affecting social emotions of migrant workers and mediation and moderation effect between them. In conclusion, our results indicate that social emotions of migrant workers are mostly positive and social emotions of migrant workers are affected by gender, number of children, birth year, education level, monthly income, occupation and working years in cities.

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