

Left-behind girls struggle for education

“Left-behind” girls in rural China, whose parents have moved from their hometown in search of work in cities and towns, have a smaller chance of attending school than their male counterparts, due, in part, to a long-held perception that men are entitled to more privileges than women, according to a recent research.

The Annual Report on Left-behind Girls in China’s Rural Areas (2016), issued on Wednesday by the China Social Welfare Foundation, found that 78.9 percent of parents in villages are inclined to bring their sons with them to bigger cities for better education. In addition, when they only have finances to pay for one child’s higher education, 97.5 percent of them would choose sons over daughters.

China’s compulsory basic education system waives most fees for elementary and middle schools, resulting in 96.1 percent of girls in rural areas attending school from ages 6 to 11. However, only 79.3 percent have access to high school education when they are aged 15 to 17, the research found.

“Dear Mom and Dad, please do not treat me and my brother differently. When my brother does something well, he gets rewarded. What about me? No reward at all. Even when I do something well, you will say, ‘This is not good enough, it should have been done better’,” one girl wrote on a questionnaire issued by the research team.

Liu Yan, of the foundation, said that when his team first started the research, they thought they could draw parallels between left-behind girls and girls in poverty.

“I was wrong. There is no such correlation. Financially, they can be doing fine. What makes their situation different is the lack of parenting. They crave their parents’ love, just like any child, but they do not have it,” Liu said.

“Some girls are told money means happiness, so they associate making money with being happy, but no one tells them why. That situation can easily drive young girls in the wrong direction,” he added.

Yuan Guilin, a professor at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization’s International Research and Training Center for Rural Education, described left-behind girls as the “underdogs of underdogs”.

“The organization has found a good angle to help the girls, by paying attention to details like whether they put on underwear, what they eat and drink, and how fairly they feel they are being treated,” Yuan said.