

Migrant Peer Effects on Students' Mental Health: Evidence from China

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China's rural-urban migration flow has resulted in millions of migrant children in classrooms. This study examines the effects of migrant peers on students' mental health using a nationally representative survey of middle school students and the random assignment of students. We find that having a higher proportion of migrant peers in class negatively affects local students' mental health. However, other migrant children and students as a whole seemed unaffected by the migrant peer effect. An investigation of this mechanism suggests that a worsened classroom environment may be the primary channel through which migrant peers influence local students' mental health.

Key Words: Peer Effect, Internal Migration, Mental Health, Migrant Child

JEL Classification: I10, I20, J10

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I. Introduction

Rural-urban migration has been a significant phenomenon in China in the past decades, leading to millions of rural-urban migrant students in urban schools. Psychologists find that migrant children have poorer mental health (Stevens and Vollebergh, 2008; Wong et al., 2009; Lin et al., 2009; Xiong and Ye, 2011; Mao and Zhao, 2012). However, little is known about how migrant peers affect the mental health of the other students in the same classroom. This paper aims to investigate the migrant peer effect on the mental health of students using a representative Chinese survey data.

With China's reform and opening up in the late 1970s and the gradual relaxation of population mobility since then, the scale of China's internal migration flows has increased dramatically from less than 7 million in 1982 to 376 million in 2021. Accordingly, there were about 71 million rural-urban migrant children in 2020, accounting for 23.86% of the total child population in China (NBS, 2022). Migrant children face various challenges, including social isolation, language barriers, and discrimination (Gu et al., 2010), which can have adverse effects on their academic performance, mental health and overall well-being.

The impact of mental health in adolescence is profound and long-lasting. Ill mental health is associated with a wide range of socio-economic outcomes, including lower educational attainment (Currie and Stabile, 2007; Fletcher, 2008, 2010; Cornaglia et al., 2015) and adverse labor market outcomes (Chatterji et al., 2007; Fletcher, 2014; Banerjee et al., 2017). Several studies have examined the peer effects on mental health and well-being (Hill et al., 2015; Rosenquist et al., 2011; Li and Lin, 2019; Di Tata et al., 2024). Despite this, there has been limited research on the effects of

migrant peers on the mental health of students. Since most students stay in the same classroom throughout the years in each stage of schooling, the classroom environment plays a crucial role in shaping individual behaviors. Therefore, our aim in this paper is to explore how migrant peers impact the mental health of classmates.

One of the challenges in studying peer effects is the nonrandom grouping of students. Students with similar characteristics tend to associate with each other, leading to self-selection bias in peer groups. To address this issue, this study uses unique data on classroom assignments obtained from the China Education Panel Survey (CEPS). The availability of information on random classroom assignments within each grade of a school enables the study to address the endogeneity problem. We focus on middle schools where students are randomly assigned to classrooms and examine the spillover effect of migrant peers on the mental health of other students.

Under this empirical framework, I find that the presence of migrant peers in the classroom has a negative impact on the mental health of local students. The results suggest that when controlling for school-by-grade effects, a 10-percentage-point increase in the proportion of migrant students in the classroom leads to a 5.5% increase in local students' mental stress index. There is little evidence of migrant peer effects on mental health of migrant students and overall mental health. The results are robust to various analysis samples and to an alternative measure of mental health.

This paper departs from the existing literature in several ways: First, previous studies have mainly examined the association between migration and mental health of migrant children. This study is, to the best of my knowledge, the first to investigate the spillover effects of migrant peers on the mental health of other migrants or local students. Second, while there have been studies on

the causal effects of migrant peers on the academic achievement of local students (to name a few among others, Hu (2018), Chen et al. (2021), and Zheng and Zhou (2024)), this study is the first to focus on a non-cognitive outcome, namely mental health, which can also have wide-ranging and long-lasting consequences. Lastly, by exploiting the random assignment of students to classrooms, this paper provides a reliable causal evidence about the effects of migrant peers on the mental health of local students, which is rare among the limited number of studies conducted in this area.

This article is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses the background of China's migrant children and classroom assignment. Section 3 introduces the data source and variables. Section 4 presents the empirical strategy. Section 5 reports the main empirical results and does robustness checks. Section 6 explores possible mechanisms and Section 7 concludes with a discussion.

II. Background

1. Migrant children's education and mental health in China

China's internal migration flows from rural areas to urban centers have resulted in many migrant children peers in the classroom. The household registration system in China, or *Hukou*, has significant implications for the education of migrant children. Unlike internal migrants in other countries, strict controls were imposed on mobility of rural hukou holders to urban areas in China (Cai et al., 2001; Afridi et al., 2015; Hu et al., 2011). Although the hukou restrictions have eased in the past three decades, migrants in Chinese cities still face many difficulties. Most of them are not covered by social health and unemployment insurance and social pensions. Numerous migrant children face

barriers in having equal access to public schools and have to attend so-called “migrant schools” that have lower quality (Feng and Chen, 2012; Chen and Feng, 2013, 2019; Meng and Xue, 2020). All these difficulties pose significant challenges for migrant children. Studies show that they are more likely to drop out of school and have a lower academic achievement (Afridi et al., 2015; Hu, 2018), fewer social connections and peer association (Mao and Zhao, 2012), a lower sense of school belonging (Li and Jiang, 2018), and are vulnerable to discriminatory abuse and poverty (Fang, 2020) as well as mental health problems including social and separation anxiety, depression, loneliness, and low self-esteem (Wang et al., 2017).

2. Class Assignment in China's Middle Schools

The revised Compulsory Education Law (CEL) of 2006 prohibits ability tracking in class assignment. That is, students should not be grouped by their pre-entry academic performances or migrant (Hukou) status into classes. To meet this requirement, middle school administrations are allowed to assign students in one of the following two ways: (i) pure-random assignment that uses (often computer-aided) lotteries to allocate students into different classes, and (ii) “balanced” assignment that ensure the average rank of the students is more or less the same across classes. The CEPS survey data shows that approximately 85% of schools assigned the newly enrolled students to classes by one of the above methods.

However, ability tracking did not disappear easily because school administrators and teachers are mainly evaluated on their students' performances in the high school entrance exams (Karachiwalla and Park, 2017). To improve student performances in the exams, school administrators often reassign students to different

classes about a year or so later after the initial assignment. In the CEPS survey data, one-third of those schools that initially complied with the law reassigned students based on ability (tracking) when students entered eighth or ninth grade.

III. Data and Variables

We use data from the China Education Panel Survey (CEPS), which is a large-scale, nationally representative, longitudinal survey that began with two cohorts; the 7th and 9th grade students in the 2013-2014 academic year. The CEPS applies a stratified, multistage sampling design, randomly selecting a school-based, nationally representative sample of approximately 20,000 students in 438 classrooms of 112 schools in 28 county-level units in mainland China. The survey includes 5 different questionnaires administered to students, parents, homeroom teachers, non-homeroom teachers who are in charge of core subjects, and school administrators. The CEPS contains detailed information on the students and their family and school environment, including socio-demographic information, academic performance, physical and mental health status, attitudes and relationships.

We exploit a question on the survey that asks both school principals and homeroom teachers about how students are assigned to classrooms. Our analysis is restricted to schools that randomly assign newly enrolled 7th-grade students to classes and do not reassign 8th- or 9th-grade students based on their previous academic performance. Additionally, we only consider schools in which homeroom teachers reported that the grade is not classified according to the total score or the score of a single subject. After all, our refined sample consists of 8,988 students across 212

classrooms in 70 schools.

The two key variables of our interest are *migrant peer composition* and *the mental health of students*. The former is immediately obtainable from the data. The CEPS survey asks students if their residential address in the Hukou (household registration) is located in the local county/district. If not, students are identified as migrant students. Then, we compute the proportion of migrant students in each class. The information about the mental health of students is obtainable from students' self-report about their mental status. Students are asked to report how often they have each of the following five feelings in the last seven days with a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always): *Feeling blue*, *Depressed*, *Unhappy*, *Not enjoying life*, and *Sad*. We conduct principal component analysis (PCA) to create a single index that captures students' mental health conditions, the so-called mental stress index. This method is widely used in the literature, for example, in Gong et al. (2021) and Hu (2018).

〈Table 1〉 Summary Statistics of Main Variables: Local vs. Migrant Students

| | Local student | Migrant student | All student | Difference |
|--|------------------|--------------------|----------------|------------|
| | Mean | Mean | Mean | |
| mental stress index | -0.0114 | 0.0444 | 0.0001 | -0.0561 |
| <u>Panel A: Student Characteristics</u> | | | | |
| male (%) | 51.18 | 52.75 | 51.51 | -1.57 |
| minority (%) | 13.18 | 7.85 | 12.06 | 5.33 |
| pre-school attendance (%) | 82.07 | 80.99 | 81.85 | 1.08 |
| agricultural hukou (%) | 43.66 | 56.65 | 46.31 | -12.99 |
| nr. of grade skipping | 0.0275 | 0.0303 | 0.0281 | -0.003 |
| nr. of grade repetition | 0.1278 | 0.2121 | 0.1455 | -0.084 |

| | Local student | Migrant student | All student | Difference |
|---|---------------|-----------------|-------------|------------|
| | Mean | Mean | Mean | |
| Panel A: Household Characteristics | | | | |
| only child (%) | 53.58 | 36.40 | 49.97 | 17.18 |
| <i>family financial conditions</i> | | | | |
| very poor (%) | 1.81 | 0.82 | 1.59 | 0.99 |
| somewhat poor (%) | 9.08 | 6.14 | 8.46 | 2.94 |
| moderate (%) | 75.11 | 81.16 | 76.38 | -6.05 |
| somewhat rich (%) | 13.24 | 11.06 | 12.78 | 2.18 |
| very rich (%) | 0.76 | 0.82 | 0.78 | -0.06 |
| The father often gets drunk (%) | 8.28 | 9.38 | 8.52 | -1.10 |
| Observations | 6702 | 1783 | 8485 | |

Notes: Column 4 shows the difference in characteristics between local and migrant students.

〈Table 1〉 presents summary statistics for our main variables: students' mental health status (the mental stress index), the migrant peer composition, and other predetermined characteristics. It shows that local students show less mental stress than migrant students. Panels A and B indicate that migrant students are more likely to have agricultural household registration, implying the large ongoing rural-urban migration flow in China. Additionally, the local students are more likely to be the only child in the family, and they may have an advantage in the dilution of family resources.

IV. Empirical Strategy

To investigate how migrant peer composition affects students'

mental health, we implement the linear-in-means model. Specifically, we use the following regression model:

$$Y_{icgs} = \alpha + \beta MigProp_{-icgs} + \mathbf{X}_{icgs}\gamma + \lambda_{gs} + \varepsilon_{icgs} \quad (1)$$

where Y_{icgs} is the mental health status of student i in class c of grade g of school s , $MigProp_{-icgs}$ is the proportion of migrant students in the class that student i belongs to, \mathbf{X}_{icgs} is the students' predetermined characteristics, λ_{gs} is the school-grade fixed effect, and ε_{icgs} is the error term.

In the above regression equation, we are particularly interested in the coefficient β that measures a marginal effect of migrant peer on students' mental health. However, the estimator for β might be biased. First, students could have sorted into classes based on some unobservable factors, which leads to a self-selection problem. To address this problem, we exploit the random class assignment by restricting the sample to include only the schools that reportedly assign students to classes in a random manner. To corroborate that these schools actually used random class assignment, we conduct balancing tests and report the results later in this section. The random class assignment is frequently used in the literature to identify the peer effects. To illustrate a few, Sacerdote (2001) examines the peer effects on roommates' academic performance by exploiting the random assignment of dormitory roommates for freshmen in the U.S. colleges. Gong et al. (2021) exploits the random classroom assignment in the Chinese schools as we do in this article to study the gender peer effects on students' academic performances and non-cognitive outcomes.

An unobservable school-specific factor such as the location might also bias the estimator for β by affecting both the local and

migrant students. For example, students might suffer from deficient facilities such as playgrounds without equipment and libraries without books if a school is situated in a rural and underdeveloped local community. Anticipating this potential harms, students could have sorted into schools because students (and their parents) choose the schools to attend. To address this issue, we include the term λ_{gs} to capture the school-grade fixed effect in all of our specifications.

Now, we examine the validity of the fundamental identification assumption in this article, *the variance in migrant composition at the class level must be random given grade-by-school fixed effects*. To this end, we regress students' predetermined characteristics on the proportion of the migrant peers in their classroom. This so-called balancing test should show no correlation if our identification assumption is valid.

〈Table 2〉 shows the balancing test results. The unconditional estimates in the first column reveal a strong correlation between the proportion of migrant peers in a class and the background characteristics of students. For example, classes with a higher percentage of migrant students tend to have students from wealthier families. These results may indicate that migrant students are more likely to attend schools in rich or urban areas rather than in rural or poor areas. Yet after we control for school fixed effects in the second column, most of the differences become much smaller and statistically insignificant. After conditioning on school-grade fixed effects in column 3, all correlations become much smaller and statistically insignificant. This suggests that the school-grade-level migrant composition is balanced across students' background characteristics, thereby lending further support to the underlying random assignment assumption.

(Table 2) Balancing Tests for the Class-Level Migrant Composition

| | No Controls | School Fixed effects | School-by-grade fixed effect |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Female | -0.0089* (0.0047) | -0.0005 (0.0019) | -0.0004 (0.0015) |
| Minority | -0.0816*** (0.0075) | 0.0090** (0.0044) | 0.0042 (0.0033) |
| No pre-school attendance | -0.0022 (0.0063) | 0.0027 (0.0026) | 0.0033* (0.0020) |
| Have siblings | 0.0215*** (0.0052) | 0.0043* (0.0023) | 0.0020 (0.0017) |
| Rich family financial conditions | 0.0281*** (0.0044) | 0.0006 (0.0019) | -0.0013 (0.0014) |
| Non-agricultural Hukou | 0.0276*** (0.0059) | -0.0046 (0.0028) | -0.0016 (0.0021) |
| Residential Hukou | 0.0263*** (0.0061) | 0.0021 (0.0027) | -0.0002 (0.0021) |
| No Hukou | 0.1485*** (0.0558) | 0.0063 (0.0228) | 0.0275 (0.0171) |
| Father often gets drunk | 0.0253*** (0.0084) | -0.0048 (0.0035) | -0.0005 (0.0026) |
| Nr. of grade skipping | -0.0074 (0.0075) | -0.0056* -0.003 | -0.0013 (0.0023) |
| Nr. of grade repetition | 0.0415*** (0.0056) | 0.0046* (0.0024) | 0.0029 (0.0018) |

Notes: The numbers are the estimated coefficients on the proportion of migrant students in the classroom for 33 separate regressions, with local students' eleven background variables as outcomes and the three specifications being no controls, controlling for school fixed effects, and controlling for grade-by-school fixed effects. Robust standard errors clustered at the school level are shown in parentheses. *** significant at 1 percent level, ** significant at 5 percent level, * significant at 10 percent level.

V. Empirical Results

In this section, we examine the casual effect of class-level migrant peers composition on students' mental health. Specifically, we examine the spill-over effect of a new migrant student on (i) the local students, (ii) the existing migrant students, and (iii) the students as a whole. We conclude this section by conducting some robustness checks.

1. Main Result: Negative Mental Health Effect of Migrant Students on Peers

Given the classrooms are randomly assigned, we examine the migrant peer effect on the students' mental health. The effects of migrant peers' proportion on the mental health of local students, migrant students, and all students are presented respectively in Panel A, B, and C of <Table 3>. The first column presents the estimates without any control variable, the second column controls for students' individual characteristics, and in the third column, grade-by-school fixed effects are additionally controlled for. The findings show that migrant peers in the classroom have a negative and statistically significant effect on the mental health of local students, while they have statistically insignificant effects on the other migrant students and the whole students in the class.

Columns (1) and (2) in Panel A show that without school-by-grade controls, the effect of migrant peers on the mental health of local students is statistically insignificant. However, the effect becomes statistically significant if school-by-grade fixed effects are controlled for, as in Column (3). Specifically, a 10-percentage-point increase in the proportion of migrant students in the classroom leads to a 5.53% increase in local students' mental stress index, suggesting a

worse mental health status of local students.

In contrast, Panel B and C suggest that the effects of migrant peers' composition on the mental health of migrant students and the whole student in the class are statistically insignificant. Interestingly, there is no evidence that having more migrant peers in the class has a positive impact on the mental health of the other migrant students. This insignificance may arise because migrants usually come from different regions, so the migrant status by itself does not lead to social bonding among migrant students, although the lack of relevant data does not allow us to test this. The insignificant effect on the whole students in the class can be attributed to the insignificant effect on the migrant students.

2. Robustness Checks

In this subsection, we conduct several robustness checks and <table 4> presents the relevant results. Specifically, we consider an alternative measure of mental health (Panel A). Instead of using the mental stress index we constructed, we measure the mental health of students by the sum of all the responses to the questions regarding mental health in the CEPS survey. For example, suppose that a student's responses are 1 to *feeling blue*, 1 to *Depressed*, 4 to *unhappy*, 5 to *not enjoying life*, 5 to *sad*. Then, our alternative measure of mental health would be $1+1+4+5+5=16$. The results in Panel A of <Table 4> are consistent with our main results in <Table 3>.

Additionally, we test the sensitivity of our main results to alternative samples. In the CEPS, Shanghai and the top 120 counties that are known for the destination of a huge number of migrants are over-sampled to accurately represent China's significant internal migration patterns. The sample of these regions is distinct from

the nationally representative sample that is randomly drawn from counties across the mainland China, and therefore is referred to as *supplementary sample*. To correct for the over-representation of these regions, we restrict the sample only to the nationally representative sample and the estimation results are given in Panel B. We also restrict the sample to exclude outliers with regard to the proportion of migrant students in a class, namely schools with no migrants and some special types of schools, so-called migrant schools, that the majority of students come from migrant families. The estimation results from this restriction are given in Panel C.

〈Table 3〉 Effects of Migrant Composition on Students' Mental Stress Index

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Panel A: Local students | | | |
| Migrant peers proportion | -0.1261 (0.0853) | 0.0487 (0.0941) | 0.5533** (0.2790) |
| R^2 | 0.0003 | 0.0326 | 0.0924 |
| Observations | 6538 | 5808 | 5808 |
| Panel B: Migrant students | | | |
| Migrant peers proportion | 0.2277* (0.0904) | 0.1111 (0.1045) | 0.2317 (0.3816) |
| R^2 | 0.0035 | 0.0326 | 0.0924 |
| Observations | 1782 | 1501 | 1501 |
| Panel C: All students | | | |
| Migrant peers proportion | 0.0893* (0.0522) | 0.1076* (0.0568) | 0.2666 (0.1848) |
| R^2 | 0.0003 | 0.0306 | 0.0634 |
| Observations | 8484 | 7407 | 7407 |

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Individual characteristics | No | Yes | Yes |
| Household characteristics | No | Yes | Yes |
| School-by-grade fixed effects | No | No | Yes |

Notes: Individual characteristics include a student's gender, age, ethnic minority status, cognitive ability test score, and agricultural hukou status. Household characteristics include parents' education levels, and dummies for only child and low household income level. Robust standard errors clustered at the school level are shown in parentheses. *** significant at 1 percent level, ** significant at 5 percent level, * significant at 10 percent level.

The results in Panel B and C show that the impacts of migrant peers' proportion on local students' mental health are negative and statistically significant, whereas the impacts on the other migrant students and the whole student in the class are insignificant. Specifically, in Panel B, when Shanghai and supplementary samples are excluded, a 10% increase in the proportion of migrant peers in the classroom leads to a 7.5% increase in local students' mental stress index. As reported in Panel C, the results remain robust when outlier schools are excluded.

Overall, the results in this subsection suggest that the negative impact of migrant peers on local students' mental health is robust to the alternative sample specifications and the alternative measure of the mental health.

〈Table 4〉 Robustness Checks

| | Local students | Migrant students | All students |
|---|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| <u>Panel A: Alternative measure of mental stress</u> | | | |
| Migrant peers proportion | 2.3140** (1.1606) | 0.5128 (1.4892) | 1.0756 (0.7453) |
| R^2 | 0.0972 | 0.1276 | 0.0874 |
| Observations | 6022 | 1627 | 7782 |
| <u>Panel B: Excluding Shanghai and supplementary samples</u> | | | |
| Migrant peers proportion | 0.7536** (0.3180) | 0.6820 (0.4349) | 0.4647** (0.2039) |
| R^2 | 0.0943 | 0.1102 | 0.0838 |
| Observations | 5108 | 1238 | 6433 |
| <u>Panel C: Excluding schools with no migrant student</u> | | | |
| Migrant peers proportion | 0.6741** (0.2840) | 0.2317 (0.3816) | 0.3138* (0.1867) |
| R^2 | 0.0893 | 0.1220 | 0.0805 |
| Observations | 5257 | 1502 | 6845 |

Notes: All regressions control for individual characteristics, household characteristics, and grade-by-school fixed effects. Robust standard errors clustered at the school level are shown in parentheses. *** significant at 1 percent level, ** significant at 5 percent level, * significant at 10 percent level.

VI. Mechanisms

In this section, we explore potential mechanisms behind our main result. The migrant peers could have negatively affected the

mental health conditions of their classmates by making a less friendly and comfortable atmosphere in the classroom. To examine the validity of this hypothesis, we exploit the two different types of questions regarding the classroom atmosphere in the CEPS survey and regress the students' answers to each question on the migrant students composition. Specifically, the first type of questions asks students about the general classroom atmosphere. They are asked if they agree with the following statements with varying degrees of intensity (from 1 to 5): "Most of my classmates are nice to me," "My class is in good atmosphere," and "I feel close to people in this school."

The other type of questions asks students about how their local classmates would do the following activities with their migrant classmates on a numerical scale from 1 (do not agree) to 5 (totally agree): (i) playing together with migrant students, (ii) discussing questions related to schoolwork, and (iii) making friends with them. These questions concern specifically the local students' friendliness to migrant students. The regression results are given in <Table 5>. We find no strong evidence but a higher proportion of migrant students seems to worsen a class atmosphere.

<Table 5> Mechanism

| Panel A: Comfortability with class | | | |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | nice classmates | good class atmosphere | feeling close to people at school |
| Migrant peers proportion | -0.1050 (0.2263) | -0.4718* (0.2755) | -0.0526 (0.2381) |
| R^2 | 0.0618 | 0.1515 | 0.0827 |
| Observations | 5791 | 5795 | 5809 |

| Panel B: Friendliness to migrant students | | | |
|---|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| | Playing together with migrant students | Discussing school-work together | Making friends with migrant students |
| Migrant peers proportion | -0.0816 (0.1952) | -0.2905 (0.1990) | -0.1515 (0.1610) |
| R^2 | 0.0335 | 0.0502 | 0.0306 |
| Observations | 5587 | 5587 | 5590 |

Notes: The numbers are the estimated coefficients on the proportion of migrant students in the classroom for 6 separate regressions with students' responses in 6 questions regarding friendly and comfortable classroom atmosphere as outcomes. Robust standard errors clustered at the school level are shown in parentheses. *** significant at 1 percent level, ** significant at 5 percent level, * significant at 10 percent level.

〈Table 6〉 Teachers' Views: Migrant Composition and Class Types

| | Class discipline | Relations among students | Observations |
|--|------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| No-Migrant Class | 3.9731 | 4.1049 | 410 |
| Class with a Small Number of Migrant Students | 3.8533 | 3.9144 | 409 |
| Class with More than 1/3 of Students Being Migrants | 3.4604 | 3.5985 | 391 |

The CEPS survey also asks teachers to rate how disciplined their classroom environments are and how well students get along with each other on a numerical scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good), for the following three types of classes, (i) class with no migrant, (ii) class with a small number of migrant students, and (iii) class with more than one third of students being migrants, respectively. 〈Table 6〉 presents teachers' mean responses. The results indicate that classes with more migrant students have worse class discipline and relations among students.

Overall, we find an evidence that having more migrant students in the classroom may worsen the classroom atmosphere and the views of teachers are consistent with this evidence. Despite its weakness, our evidence is also consistent with the studies showing that children in more negative classroom environments have more emotional and behavior problems (Milkie and Warner, 2011; Plenty and Jonsson, 2017; Oberle et al., 2018; Di Tata et al., 2024).

VII. Conclusion

In this article, we study whether and how the presence of migrant students affects the mental health of their classmates using the data from CEPS. To address the potential endogeneity problem that the migrant peer composition is likely to be an outcome of school or family choices (Card, 2013; Ohinata and Van Ours, 2013), we restrict our sample to the schools that randomly assign students to classes according to the Compulsory Education Law that forbids ability tracking in class assignment. Our main result is that migrant peers have negative spillover effects on their local classmates, while the effects on their migrant peers are largely insignificant. This negative effect might come from making classroom atmosphere less friendly and comfortable but further research needs to be done to corroborate this. Lastly, we would like to mention that the evidence we find from China has implications for the other countries, particularly for countries such as South Korea and Japan that have seen the number of immigrants and foreign workers has risen sharply.

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국문초록

이주자 자녀가 또래 학생들의 정신건강에 미치는 또래효과: 중국의 사례

이종재*

중국의 농촌에서 도시로의 이주로 인해 교실에서는 수백만 명의 이주 아동이 생겨났다. 이 논문은 중학생을 대상으로 한 전국단위 설문조사 데이터와 교육법 개정으로 인한 학생들을 무작위 학급 배정을 이용하여 이주자 자녀가 또래 학생들의 정신 건강에 미치는 또래 효과를 연구하였다. 주요 결과는 교실내 이주학생 비율이 더 높을수록 본래 해당 지역에 거주하는 학생들의 정신 건강이 악화되는 반면, 이전에 이주해온 다른 이주학생들과 교실 내 학생 전반적으로는 그와 같은 효과가 없다는 것이다. 이러한 결과를 추동하는 메커니즘을 살펴보면 이주 학생으로 인한 학급내 분위기 및 환경 악화를 생각할 수 있다.

핵심주제어: 또래 효과, 국내 이주, 정신건강, 이주자 자녀

JEL Classification: I10, I20, J10

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