

This paper investigates the impact of China's 2014 hukou reform on the practice of only bringing sons to cities and leaving daughters behind (BSLD) in rural-urban migrant families. The hukou system, a household registration policy, has imposed severe restrictions on China's internal migration, limiting access to urban social services for rural-urban migrants. These constraints have resulted in a higher probability of migration for rural boys compared to girls.

The 2014 hukou reform, which was followed by localized policy changes in 2015, enabled migrant workers to obtain an urban resident hukou and access urban services even without it. This paper examines how the reform has influenced the BSLD behavior among rural-urban migrant families. We use data from the 2013-2017 China Migrants Dynamic Survey, with samples from 140 cities, and employs a Difference-in-Differences method. The findings show that the reform significantly reduced the probability of BSLD by 0.224, with the most significant effects observed from the central region. The paper also examines possible channels of this impact, including hukou reform increasing urban settlement intent, improving the financial conditions, and promoting migrant households to join in urban insurance. The results show that hukou reform influences BSLD behavior by increasing the net income of migrant families.

This paper contributes to three strands of literature. First, by using 2014 hukou reform as a research context, we explore the impact of hukou relaxation on the migration behavior of children of migrant families, thus filling a gap in the existing literature in policy evaluation studies. Second, instead of focusing solely on school-age children, we include all children under 17. This broader approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of how hukou reforms affect the migration behavior of children in migrant families. Last, this paper focuses on partial parent-child separation behavior where only daughters are left behind, which not only harms daughters who are separated from their parents but also exposes them to unequal treatment compared to their brothers. Our study bridges the gap in the existing literature and provides a basis for addressing the gender inequality faced by rural girls.