

# Acting Head of the Household: A Special Phenomenon of Left-Behind Families in China

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## DESCRIPTION

The "Acting Head of the Household (AHTH)" is a psychosocial phenomenon seen in Left-Behind Families (LBF) [1]. After their husbands left home, some Left-Behind Women (LBW) encountered maladjustment and difficulties in changing roles [2]. They are inadequate in their responsibilities as the head of the household and will take the initiative to establish a closer connection with someone outside the family. In addition to daily affairs, these LBW will ask and follow the opinions of the outsider of the family when it comes to large and small decision-making events related to the family. In the process of helping and supporting LBF, this role becomes the actual decision-maker, instructor, and even rescuer of LBF. Instead, it becomes the real "head of household" of LBF. The AHTH is generally a person known and recognized by all family members. They often get the gratitude of family members for their long-term help to the LBF and the positive significance of maintaining the stability of the LBF.

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The AHTH has some positive meanings for LBF: 1. relieving LBW's feelings of loneliness and insecurity when their husbands are away from home. 2. Can avoid conflicts between husband and wife, thus maintaining the stability of LBF to a certain extent. However, the "acting head of household" will also harm LBF, which is mainly reflected in three aspects;

1. The AHTH will hinder LBW from establishing a healthy psychological coping mechanism. LBW tend to have a very high dependence on the AHTH. Because it alleviates the

anxiety of LBW, LBW do not need to develop their ability to assume family responsibilities aggravate their role transition difficulty [2].

2. The AHTH will affect the children's psychological development. On the one hand, as a person outside the family, the AHTH cannot truly gain the children's trust, and the children may even feel resistance because the outsider is too involved in family affairs. On the other hand, children will not get the support they deserve because of their mother's weakness. Therefore children tend to be full of anger. In such families, the relationship between LBW and their children is often tense, affecting the children's psychological development in interpersonal relationships, especially in establishing intimate relationships [4].
3. The AHTH will cover up the original problems of the left-behind family. The AHTH is a temporarily unstable component of the left-behind family structure. The fundamental issues of the family have not been resolved; sometimes, the family problems may even be worsened by the role of the AHTH [5].

## CONCLUSION

The current theories and research on left-behind families focus on the psychological state of family members or the relationship between family members. Still, it is easy to overlook the "acting head of the household", an important external factor that affects LBF. Therefore, the "acting head of household" is a blind spot in psychosocial services and has not yet attracted widespread attention.

The future work direction for the phenomenon of AHTH should include at least the following three aspects:

1. Conduct scientific investigation and research on the phenomenon of AHTH.
2. At the social level, improve the social security mechanism and service system for LBF.

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3. Explore psychological counseling theories and service methods for LBF to help them establish a healthy and effective psychological coping mechanism.

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