



An Analysis of the Unemployment Problem of Middle-aged and Old-aged Migrant Worker Groups

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Abstract: Full employment is usually regarded as a barometer of a country's or region's economic and social development, together with economic growth, price stability and balance of payments, and it is one of the four indicators used to monitor the country's macroeconomic performance and carry out macroeconomic control. However, the advent of the post-pandemic era has had an indelible impact on economic and social development, and in the area of social employment, unemployment is a common problem faced by all countries in the world today. Unemployment not only makes it difficult to improve one's quality of life, but also threatens family and social stability, aggravates social conflicts, and has a negative impact on economic development. Nowadays, with the advent of the longevity era, age discrimination in the labor market should be eliminated to support the re-employment needs of the elderly who are willing to work. This paper takes the group of middle-aged and old-aged migrant workers, a common group of unemployed people in the society, as the research object, clarifies the sense of the problem, starts from the relevant theories of unemployment, explores the causes and effects of unemployment, and on the basis of this, examines how to manage unemployment, and further discusses the problem of unemployment in China.

Keywords: middle-aged and older groups, migrant workers, unemployment, increasing employment, combating unemployment

1. Introduction

Unemployment means that a part of society loses a reliable source of economic income, the standard of living declines and the social misery index rises, leading to serious psychological problems in the group. Unemployment causes great psychological pressure on the working-age population of all ages who are able and willing to work, and in the labor force, which is further divided into the working-age population. Migrant workers who are older and less educated are more likely to be expelled from the labor market, and unemployment hits them harder. At this time, the positions left for them in the market can easily be replaced by others, and even if they can be re-employed, it is extremely unstable; at the same time, they have already lost their land in the countryside, and have become "landless peasants", but they still choose to stay in the city, and the pressure to support their families makes them unwilling to lose their source of income, and they would rather engage in the high-intensity manual labor, which is difficult for their bodies to withstand, and this has become one of the reasons put forward by Joan Robinson. This has become a kind of "hidden unemployment" proposed by Joan Robinson. (The concept of "hidden unemployment" was introduced in 1930 by Joan Robinson, a leading representative of the Cambridge School.) This paper focuses on "involuntary unemployment" among the middle-aged and older groups of migrant workers. (Involuntary unemployment is a concept introduced in 1936 by the British economist Keynes in his book *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, and the key to eliminating involuntary unemployment is to increase effective demand.) That is to say, unemployment is caused by objective factors, and the root cause is the lack of effective demand; as long as the lack of effective demand exists, no employer will be willing to hire this group, even if they are willing to accept lower wages. This will inevitably lead to a reduction in their income and a life of poverty, so that they are ostracized by society and become "outsiders" in society.

Guizhou local rugged mountainous terrain, farmland into small pieces of division, can't form a plain agriculture, agriculture is difficult to develop into a large-scale; coupled with the mountainous geographical conditions, external transportation is inconvenient, but also few people buy and sell business, industry and commerce is difficult to breed. The poverty and backwardness of the situation makes the local people tend to go out to work, and still inter-provincial mobility, mostly scattered along the coast of Guangdong, engaged in manual labor. the early 1990s, is the local working boom, 15-45-year-old young men and women are all backpacks to leave their homes, a year in the unfamiliar field, only the end of the year to return to their hometowns. For nearly 30 years since then, the working boom has continued, with many people going out to work right after graduating from junior and senior high school, mainly in six major industries: manufacturing,

construction, wholesale and retail trade, transportation, warehousing and postal services, accommodation and catering, and residential services, repairs and other services. (Classification derived from the National Statistical Office's Migrant Worker Monitoring Survey Report 2023.) However, in the past three years, since the epidemic, there has been a large number of unemployed middle-aged and old-aged rural migrant workers, and the rural population has returned to the primary sector from the secondary and tertiary sectors. Because of the limited agricultural conditions, the income from farming is less than half of what they used to earn from working, and the rural migrant workers have deeply experienced the pain and helplessness of unemployment. As a result of the massive shrinkage of agricultural land, many landless peasants have gone to the cities to become migrant workers and then returned to their hometowns in a state of joblessness or in a state of inactivity, with no protection for their livelihoods; their incomes are unstable, and the interests of the group are seriously jeopardized, and problems such as the inadequacy of the social security system has not been effectively solved, resulting in a number of unemployed peasants becoming vulnerable groups who are left with no land to cultivate, no jobs to be found, and no share in the social security system.

2. Factors affecting unemployment

2.1 Micro-level

The low level of education and vocational skills of the middle- and old-aged migrant worker group, and the inability of their own abilities to match market demand, are the personal factors contributing to their massive unemployment. Due to their family background and other reasons, they have received insufficient education and training, and their non-cognitive ability is low, which is an important factor for employers to examine in addition to physical strength in the workplace. Scholar Tan Xiao has studied the "35-year-old phenomenon", which is the difference in the impact of non-cognitive ability on the quality of employment at different stages of a worker's career. In fact, the employment demand of middle-aged and old-aged migrant workers is very strong. Not only should they be trained in skilled labor, but also be given appropriate opportunities in other areas, so as to enhance the diversity of their employment opportunities. This is the risk of individual differences in unemployment. In Guizhou, for example, most of the local migrant workers who go out to work have elementary school education, and some of them are even uneducated, which makes it difficult for them to adapt to the changing external market environment.

2.2 Meso-level

Enterprises and organizations have a profound impact on the employment of rural migrant workers, for example, the adoption of robots by enterprises to replace workers has had a strong impact on their employment, especially manual workers. For safety and efficiency reasons, more and more enterprises are using large machines, which are very unfavorable to middle-aged and old-aged rural migrant workers who do not have a certain level of skills, greatly squeezing their employment space. Most of the local migrant workers in Guizhou choose to work in Guangdong and Fujian, where more and more machines are being used in electronic factories and other processing plants, and assembly line workers are gradually being replaced. In Guangdong, processing factories such as electronics factories are increasingly using machines, and assembly line workers are gradually being replaced. There are also migrant workers in the construction, manufacturing and transportation industries, and many of them have to face layoffs. Coupled with the real estate slump of the past two years, the construction industry has seen a significant reduction in the number of workers needed compared with the past, also threatening the employment of rural migrant workers, which is a policy risk of unemployment.

2.3 Macro-level

Migrant worker groups are mostly employed in informal employment, and the operating mechanism of the market has the greatest impact on them, as they are at the most precarious level of the employment structure. With the current prevalence of the sharing economy, such as take-out, this kind of odd-job labor the most precarious reserve army, making the precariousness of working-class employment even worse. Now that we are in the era of artificial intelligence, industrial robots have strong substitutability in work tasks, and low and medium-skilled jobs are more likely to be replaced by automation, which means that middle-aged and old-aged rural migrant workers are not only likely to be weakened in their labor income, but also may face a greater risk of unemployment of migrant workers. In recent years, the transformation and upgrading of the industrial structure introduced by the state has had an impact on the migrant worker groups in Guizhou studied, especially the middle-aged and old-aged migrant workers, who have returned to their hometowns more and more in recent years, either because of the decline in their physical demand for labor, or because of the employment in the field of employment, for example, the infrastructure industry faces a cold situation, and no longer need so many construction workers.

3. The impact of unemployment

3.1 Lower income

Middle- and old-aged migrant workers are at the middle-age stage of their families, with the pressure of old-age pensioners at the top and the pressure of bringing up their offspring at the bottom. The loss of their current jobs has a direct impact on their incomes, which reduces their quality of life. At the same time, most of the rural migrant worker groups are "low-income insurance" and "record-keeping card" families before they are fully lifted out of poverty, and the continuation of the situation of lower income or even no income will probably lead to their return to poverty in the long run. In addition, most of the middle-aged and old-aged farming groups have been laid off, and the expansion of social influence is not conducive to promoting economic growth by stimulating the economy through consumption. In Guizhou, for example, the income of most families in rural areas comes from the wages sent back by those who go out to work, and if they lose their jobs, what awaits them is that the family's food, clothing, housing and transportation will be affected. With aging parents laboring in the fields all day and children in school after compulsory education, the impact of unemployment is enormous.

3.2 Affecting the quality of family life

The current lower social status of the migrant workers' group is due to the long-standing situation of their families, i.e., the absence of the drive for "cultural reproduction" discussed by Bourdieu, who are usually eager for their children to become successful through schooling and naturally invest a certain amount of capital in education. However, once they lose their jobs, all aspects of family consumption are reduced, including the quality of education and the quality of life. The most intuitive impact is on the quality of life, which is likely to be below the social average. For example, when the two main laborers in a two-migrant worker household lose their jobs, their quality and standard of living will undoubtedly decline, perhaps in terms of daily expense or in terms of the simplicity of the dinner table.

3.3 Causing psychological stress

Lower incomes and lower quality of life resulting from long-term unemployment will exert strong social pressure on the rural migrant worker community, which will not be able to emphasize their roles, nor will they be able to develop their vocational skills, and will probably enter a state of social isolation. When they return to the countryside, they are neither urban workers nor rural peasants because they are now unemployed and have lost their specific status, which leads to their lack of integration and is the main cause of psychological pressure. As mentioned above most of the rural migrant workers' fields have been recovered by the state due to the policy of "returning farmland to forests", so even if they go back to the countryside, they have no fields to cultivate, no land to plow, the familiar countryside no longer accepts them, and the peasants they know no longer have any common topics with them, so their living environment has been greatly changed and the scope of their activities has been contracted, which makes them feel very nervous. Their living environment has been greatly changed, and the scope of their activities has been narrowed, which makes them more maladaptive and leads to a sharp increase in psychological pressure.

3.4 Enhancing social destabilization

Migrant workers are a group in society whose situation has a bearing on the functioning of society as a whole. Society is also affected to a certain extent by the combination of lower incomes and difficulties in integrating them into society after they become unemployed. The migration and withdrawal of groups in society are factors that influence social change, for example, the large number of immigrants entering the country is likely to lead to a large number of crimes and disorders in society. The unemployment of a large number of rural migrant workers also increases social instability. In one area of Guizhou studied, for example, middle-aged and old-aged migrant workers have become unemployed after returning home from overseas work, a status that makes them more or less bitter in their hearts, and in the case of the more extreme, they may take the path of endangering others or ending their own lives.

4. Strategies to combat unemployment

4.1 Welfare security

The State can introduce relevant welfare policies to ensure the quality of life of unemployed rural migrant workers who have lost their land, and establish a social security system so that they do not return to poverty. The government can help unemployed rural migrant workers tide over their difficulties after being laid off by increasing spending in the areas of education, health care, education and infrastructure construction. In addition, regional employment security bureaus could pay more attention to this group of migrant workers and provide them with employment assistance, such as skills

training and learning opportunities, as well as services such as employment information and job referrals, in order to make more employment opportunities available to this group of migrant workers. Guizhou is also implementing relevant welfare protection in response to the phenomenon of unemployment among middle-aged and elderly migrant workers, such as further comprehensive statistics in rural areas on those who are eligible for old-age insurance, so that at least some of the unemployed migrant workers can be provided with basic livelihood support.

4.2 Policy guidance

Governments have been appropriately guiding the market through policy instruments, for example, by investing in infrastructure development to stimulate related economic activity and employment opportunities. Enterprises can use this as a means of recruiting new employees, especially in the construction, manufacturing and transportation sectors, where migrant workers are more familiar with the relevant job content. In addition, there is also the tertiary sector - the service industry - where migrant workers can improve their competitiveness for employment by working in new industries such as takeaways. It has been observed that many migrant workers who quit the secondary industry have chosen to work in the tertiary industry. Because the takeaway industry has fewer restrictions on employment and the basic work skills are easy to master, there are some people who enter the takeaway industry, who also work hard but are more willing to engage in even lower-paid jobs than to lose their jobs.

4.3 Labor market regulation

Migrant worker groups should consider the structure of employment as a major consideration in the labor market; in recent years, industrial restructuring and upgrading has led to the rapid development of the tertiary sector and a decline in the secondary sector. In order to continue to be employed, migrant workers can try to enter other industries in addition to industry, so as to keep up with the employment trend and see the right time to be employed. In a rural area in Guizhou, where the study was conducted some of the migrant workers who returned to their hometowns have nothing to do at home all day long, but in fact, there are employment opportunities for them as long as they are willing to do so. At the same time, in order to better match the employment skills with the pay of the job, it is necessary to have a policy guidance and governmental management, and migrant groups should always pay attention to the policy guidance and employment in accordance with the market demand.

5. Concluding remarks

Observations of the current situation of re-employment among middle-aged and elderly migrant workers who have lost their land in a rural area of Guizhou have revealed that they actually have a strong desire to find employment, but suffer from a lack of suitable jobs. At present, many places in Guizhou have introduced relevant policies to provide employment information to encourage the employment of migrant workers. Although the prevention and control of the epidemic in China has been effective, the impact of the epidemic on the unemployment of rural migrant workers will have a certain inertia, and it is necessary to pay attention to this vulnerable group in the follow-up work. This paper discusses the causes and effects of unemployment and proposes specific countermeasures. It is noted that the level of education and personal skills have a great impact on career development, and at the same time, the negative impact of unemployment on the middle-aged and old-aged rural migrant worker groups is huge, and more employment opportunities should be provided for the unemployed through economic policies, welfare protection, etc., in order to promote the social integration and living standards of this group and to push the economy towards a stable and better development.

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