

# Factors Influencing the Well-being of Urban Migrant Workers

Zheng Jin<sup>1, \*</sup>, Liu Mengya<sup>1</sup>, Zhang Huifei<sup>1</sup>, Wang Qiaojie<sup>1</sup>, Tang Ju<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of South China

\* 3114515870@qq.com

---

**Abstract.** With the acceleration of urbanization, a large number of rural migrant workers have poured into cities, becoming an important driving force for urban construction and development. However, due to issues such as urban-rural disparities, inadequate social security, and lack of social trust, urban migrant workers face many difficulties that affect their sense of well-being and quality of life. This study quantitatively analyzes the well-being of migrant workers using data from the 2021 China General Social Survey, aiming to explore the impact of social security, social integration, and social needs on the well-being of urban migrant workers. Meanwhile, through literature review and theoretical analysis, the inherent connections and impact mechanisms among these factors are revealed. The results show that an improved social security system, enhanced social trust, and fulfillment of social needs can significantly enhance the well-being of urban migrant workers, providing important theoretical and practical support for achieving social harmony and promoting integrated urban-rural development.

**Keywords:** urban migrant workers, well-being, social security, social needs

---

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Against the backdrop where fundamental breakthroughs in the dual urban-rural system reform have yet to occur, the urban-rural income gap continues to widen, resulting in an increasingly evident trend of rural migrant workers becoming surplus laborers in agriculture and shifting towards cities. According to the “2022 Survey Report on Migrant Workers,” the total number of migrant workers continues to grow, with the growth rate of local migrant workers exceeding that of migrant workers from other areas. In 2022, the total number of migrant workers nationwide reached 295.62 million, an increase of 3.11 million compared to the previous year, with a growth rate of 1.1% [1]. Migrant workers are gradually becoming the core group of the floating population in cities. Therefore, paying attention to the integration of new-era migrant workers into cities is crucial for the overall harmony of society and the sustainable development of the economy. At the rural level, in recent years, both the central and local governments have successively introduced related talent subsidy and talent introduction policies, encouraging university talents to work at the grassroots level, which has alleviated the situation of “empty villages due to people leaving” to a certain extent. However, urban migrant workers still face major contradictions. Due to the higher wages in cities compared to rural areas, they have to stay in cities for livelihoods, but they lack a sense of belonging to the urban environment. One important reason is their relatively weak perception of happiness in urban life. The well-being of urban migrant workers directly affects their quality of life and work efficiency, and also has important implications for China’s economic development, social stability, and social transformation.

### 1.2. Significance of the Study

Migrant workers represent a unique phenomenon in China’s industrialization and urbanization processes. Every year, a large number of migrant workers leave their hometowns to work in cities. They not only provide a strong guarantee of human resources for economic growth and industrialization but also serve as an effective means for industrial areas to support agriculture, cities to support rural areas, and developed regions to promote the development of underdeveloped areas. Despite the significant contributions of migrant workers to China’s economic development and urbanization, they face practical difficulties in the process of integration into cities due to reasons such as lack of knowledge and skills and the urban-rural dual system. They often suffer from unfair treatment such as identity discrimination, institutional exclusion, and implicit segregation, resulting in a lack of

emotional bonds with the city and organizations they belong to, frequent job changes, and identity confusion. These negative impacts not only affect the work and quality of life of migrant workers but also pose significant challenges to China's ongoing urbanization process and the construction of a harmonious society. Therefore, in-depth research on the dilemma of "sense of belonging" among migrant workers in cities holds important theoretical and practical significance.

## 2. Literature Review and Research Hypotheses

### 2.1. Connotation of Migrant Workers

Migrant workers are a unique social group that emerged in China after the reform and opening-up. Their origin lies mainly in China's unique household registration system and land system. Therefore, fundamentally speaking, migrant workers are a phenomenon of the system. Due to China's unique dual urban-rural development model, population migration between urban and rural areas did not undergo a transformation from peasants to citizens, including a complete transformation of status and occupation, but rather gradually experienced a unique process from peasants to migrant workers and then to urban residents. Migrant workers serve as the bridge of identity transformation. Migrant workers are the product of China's unique urban-rural dual system and have formed a special social group in a special historical period [2]. Migrant workers include two types of people: one type is rural laborers employed in local township enterprises who maintain rural ties, and the other type is rural laborers who enter towns to engage in secondary or tertiary industry jobs and disconnect from rural areas; the latter is mainly referred to as migrant workers. According to existing research, migrant workers can be defined as a group living and working in cities while maintaining rural household registration and rights unchanged [3].

### 2.2. Connotation of Migrant Workers' Subjective Well-being

The term "happiness" has appeared for a long time. According to different judgments of happiness criteria, happiness can be divided into subjective well-being and objective well-being. Subjective well-being can clearly identify the relationship between the factors of happiness, thus becoming the main path of happiness research [4]. The subjective well-being of migrant workers requires joint efforts from the government, society, and individuals to address a series of institutional problems brought about by the dual urban-rural system. There should be more attention paid to the mentality of migrant workers, giving them more care and respect, enabling them to fully integrate into urban life, enjoy the achievements of urban civilization, and obtain better education and more stable employment [5]. Numerous empirical studies have shown that the factors influencing subjective well-being are extremely diverse, involving not only demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and marriage but also external factors such as human capital, social capital, and environment [6-8].

### 2.3. Social Security and the Well-being of Urban Migrant Workers

Macro-environmental factors are closely related to individual well-being. An individual's level of education, healthcare status, and social security system all have an impact on their sense of well-being, with the influence of other factors relatively minor [9]. Currently, China has gradually established a relatively sound social security system [10]. Research indicates that pension insurance plays a role in enhancing redistribution, helping to alleviate income disparities caused by economic development, thus enhancing the well-being of migrant worker groups [11]. Based on the above points, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Social security has a significant impact on the subjective well-being of migrant workers.

### 2.4. Social Integration and the Well-being of Urban Migrant Workers

The social integration of migrant workers mainly manifests in the integration of social network relationships, which varies according to the distance of migration [12]. Under the dual urban-rural system, the socioeconomic status of most migrant workers is lower than that of urban residents, and their social interactions in cities are less likely to transform into close personal relationships and social resources. The impact of urban cultural concepts on the psychology of migrant workers makes it difficult for them to adapt, resulting in tense urban-rural interpersonal relationships and reducing their level of trust in the people around them, thereby lowering their subjective well-being [13]. Additionally, migrant worker groups typically have a strong sense of hometown identity. Even though they live in cities, their social circle is limited to interactions with fellow migrants, and they rarely participate in activities of local social organizations. This situation to some extent hinders the interaction between migrant workers and local residents, thus adversely affecting their urban integration [14-15]. Based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Social integration has a significant impact on the well-being of migrant workers.

### 2.5. Housing Demand and the Well-being of Urban Migrant Workers

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory suggests that humans have five levels of different needs, namely physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and the highest level of self-actualization needs. The hierarchy of needs varies among different groups [4]. Migrant workers in urban areas usually have their basic physiological needs met, but to enhance their sense of well-being in urban life, they strive to pursue higher-level needs. At the same time, the current migrant worker population has undergone significant changes [16]. They are no longer like the previous generation, temporarily working in cities before returning to their hometowns for development, but are more determined to choose to stay in urban areas for living [17]. For migrant workers, owning their own property has become one of the important factors in determining whether they settle down. Foreign studies have emphasized the importance of housing property rights, pointing out that families who own housing property rights usually have higher levels of satisfaction and security [18]. In China, research on the relationship between housing and subjective well-being emerged relatively late, with some scholars mainly focusing on analyzing the impact of housing property rights on residents' well-being. According to data analysis by Lin Jiang et al. [19], individuals who own property have significantly higher levels of well-being than renters. Further research has found that the size of the housing property has different effects on the well-being of migrant workers. Owning large-property housing can significantly enhance well-being, while owning small-property housing does not have a significant impact on well-being [20]. Based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Housing demand has a significant impact on the subjective well-being of migrant workers.

### 3.. Research Design

#### 3.1. Data Source

The data used in this study are sourced from the China General Social Survey (CGSS). We selected survey questionnaire results from 2021, including 19 provinces and municipalities such as Beijing, Hunan, Jiangxi, Anhui, Inner Mongolia, among others, for screening and summarization. These data cover the eastern, central, and western regions of China. By assigning numerical values to questionnaire answers, we obtained the quantitative data required for this study. During the data processing process, we excluded samples that omitted important information variables and filled in some missing values with an "approximately equal" form. Since the proportion of samples excluded is very small, it does not affect the validity of the samples.

#### 3.2. Variable Assumptions

**(1) Dependent Variable.** The dependent variable of this study is the happiness index of rural migrant workers in psychological perception. The happiness index is a positive psychological experience based on life satisfaction, and the specific happiness index is a subjective indicator value measuring the degree of this psychological experience. Individual happiness indexes are influenced by various factors, mainly including income, employment, housing, education, environment, health, hygiene, community life, institutional management, safety, work-family relationships, and satisfaction with living conditions. The happiness data of migrant workers in this paper are divided into two parts: intrinsic happiness scores and comprehensive weighted scores reflecting extrinsic happiness. The final result is the weighted average of the two. Intrinsic happiness scores are directly given by the respondents, while extrinsic happiness scores are numerical values derived from the evaluation of the objective environment.

**(2) Independent Variables.** The independent variables, namely explanatory variables, in this study include whether individuals own urban property, whether they hold urban medical insurance, whether they frequently gather with family members, and whether they get along well with neighbors. In data processing, we assign a value of "1" to positive responses and a value of "0" to negative responses.

**(3) Control Variables.** The control variables in this study include stable factors that affect the dependent variable, such as age, gender, education level, marital status, etc. Through data preprocessing, we score the questionnaire results as follows: during the data preprocessing stage, we standardize the control variables and uniformly encode factors such as age, gender, education level, and marital status to ensure data consistency and comparability. This helps effectively control the influence of these factors on the research results in subsequent data analysis, making the research conclusions more reliable and accurate.

**Table 1.** Variables' Category

	Variable	Category
Dependent	Comprehensive happiness score	Numeric variable
Independent	Gender	1 = Male 2 = Female
	Age	Numeric Variable 1 = No education 2 = Primary school 3 = Junior high school
	Education level	4 = High school 5 = University 6 = Graduate and above

**Table 1.** Continued

Variable	Category
Income	Numeric Variable
Marital status	0 = Married 1 = Unmarried
Social insurance	1 = Participated 2 = Not participated 7 = Not applicable
Urban property purchase	1 = Yes 2 = No
Urban car purchase	1 = Yes 2 = No
Satisfaction with surrounding natural environment	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Somewhat disagree 4 = Somewhat agree 5 = Agree 6 = Strongly agree
Getting along well with surrounding residents	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Somewhat disagree 4 = Somewhat agree 5 = Agree 6 = Strongly agree

## 4. Empirical Testing

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics

We divided the surveyed individuals into two groups: urban migrant workers and local urban residents, based on their registered household type and current place of residence. Tables 2 and 3 provide detailed descriptions of the personal characteristics of urban migrant workers, including their age, gender, personal income level, education level, and marital status.

### 4.2. Multivariate Regression Analysis

#### 4.2.1. Model Specification

To thoroughly investigate the factors influencing the subjective well-being of migrant workers, we employed a regression model to analyze the dependent variable. In model specification, we considered external factors such as age, gender, education level, marital status, etc., as control variables. The preliminary constructed model is as follows:

$$Y_i = \beta_1 + X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \beta_3 X_{3i} + \beta_4 X_{4i} + \dots + \beta_k X_{ki} + \mu_i \tag{1}$$

Where  $i=1,2,\dots,n$ , and  $\beta_j$  ( $j=1,2,\dots,k$ ) represents the regression coefficient.

To study the impact of the six parameters on the subjective happiness index of urban migrant workers, we adjusted the model as follows:

$$Y_{happy} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{bmi} + \beta_2 X_{relate} + \beta_3 X_{cmi} + \beta_4 X_{sec} + \beta_5 X_{cpi} + \beta_6 X_{swi} + \mu_i \tag{2}$$

In the above model,  $Y_{happy}$  represents the subjective well-being index of migrant workers.  $\beta_0$  is the intercept term, and  $\beta_1$  through  $\beta_6$  are the coefficients of the respective independent variables, indicating their impact on happiness.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Gender	1918	1	2	1.60	0.489
Birthdate	1918	1929	2003	1969.90	17.592
Education Level	1918	0	13	5.37	3.230
Income	1918	0	9,999,999	1,166,178.95	3,147,022.170
Marital Status	1918	1	7	3.30	1.495
Valid Cases (columns)	1918				

**Table 3.** Detailed Descriptions of the Personal Characteristics of Urban Migrant Workers

Variable	Frequency	Percentage	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender:			Marital Status:		
Male	762	39.7%	Married	135	75.43%
Female	1,156	60.3%	Unmarried	44	24.58%
Education Level:			Province Distribution:		
No Education	189	9.8%	Anhui Province	77	4.0%
Primary school	370	19.3%	Beijing	84	4.4%
Junior high school	594	31.0%	Fujian Province	53	2.8%
High school	366	19%	Gansu Province	83	4.3%
University	377	19.7%	Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region	65	3.4%
Graduate & above	22	1.1%	Hebei Province	50	2.6%
Age Group:			Henan Province	76	4.0%
Below 18	0	0%	Hubei Province	244	12.7%
19-30	206	10.6%	Hunan Province	214	11.2%
30-40	335	17.4%	Jiangsu Province	82	4.3%
40-50	333	17.5%	Jiangxi Province	119	6.2%
50-60	356	18.5%	Liaoning Province	32	1.7%
Above 60	688	36%	Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region	5	0.3%
Annual Income (Labor Income):			Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region	32	1.7%
0-20000	770	42.4%	Shandong Province	236	12.3%
20000-60000	607	32.7%	Shanxi Province	48	2.5%
60000-100000	221	12.1%	Shaanxi Province	66	3.4%
100000-200000	75	4%	Zhejiang Province	95	5.0%
200000 & above	32	1.8%	Chongqing	257	13.4%

#### 4.2.2. Empirical Analysis

Through calculations using statistical software such as SPSS and Stata, the results indicate a significant linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. This suggests that the subjective well-being of urban migrant workers is influenced by factors such as whether they own urban properties or cars, whether they have social insurance, their satisfaction with the surrounding natural environment, and the degree of harmony with their neighbors.

**Table 4.** Coefficient a

Model	Coefficient a							
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Significance	95.0% Confidence Interval of B		
	B	Standard Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
(Constant)	4.422	0.215		20.605	0.000	4.001	4.842	
1	$X_{swi}$	0.184	0.026	0.174	6.954	0.000	0.132	0.235
	$X_{cpi}$	-0.256	0.042	-0.392	-6.099	0.000	-0.338	-0.174
	$X_{sec}$	0.537	0.133	0.098	4.036	0.000	0.276	0.798
	$X_{cmi}$	0.230	0.041	0.362	5.633	0.000	0.150	0.310
	$X_{relate}$	0.126	0.023	0.132	5.387	0.000	0.080	0.172
	$X_{bmi}$	0.072	0.025	0.064	2.845	0.004	0.022	0.121

$$y = 4.422 + 0.072X_{bmi} + 0.126X_{relate} + 0.230X_{cmi} + 0.537X_{sec} - 0.256X_{cpi} + 0.184X_{swi}$$

(where  $X_{bmi}$  represents participation in urban basic medical insurance,  $X_{relate}$  represents harmonious interaction with local residents,  $X_{cmi}$  represents participation in commercial medical insurance,  $X_{sec}$  represents ownership of property and vehicles,

$X_{cpi}$  represents participation in commercial endowment insurance, and  $X_{swi}$  represents satisfaction with the surrounding environment).

(a) Social Integration and Subjective Well-being of Migrant Workers

According to the regression results, harmonious interaction with local residents and satisfaction with the surrounding environment contribute to enhancing the well-being of migrant workers in urban life, thus confirming research hypothesis H<sub>1</sub>.

(b) Housing Demand and Subjective Well-being of Migrant Workers

The regression analysis results indicate that owning property and vehicles helps migrant workers feel secure, reducing concerns about inconvenience in transportation and limited rental periods, thereby enhancing their well-being in urban life. Research hypothesis H<sub>2</sub> is confirmed.

(c) Social Security and Subjective Well-being of Migrant Workers

According to the regression analysis results, participating in urban basic medical insurance and commercial medical insurance significantly improves the well-being of migrant workers, partially supporting research hypothesis H<sub>3</sub>. It is noted that purchasing endowment insurance significantly affects the subjective well-being of migrant workers, but its impact does not manifest as a promoting factor. The reason for this phenomenon may be the internal variability in the impact of different levels of pension insurance on well-being, leading to different research results.

#### 4.2.3. Model Examination

**Table 5.** Collinearity Diagnosis a

Collinearity Diagnosis a										
Model	Dimension	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	(Constant)	Variance Proportion					
					x6	x5	x4	x3	x2	x1
1	1	2.773	1.000	0.04	0.03	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.03	0.03
	2	1.547	1.339	0.01	0.06	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.07	0.00
	3	0.859	1.797	0.07	0.10	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.16	0.50
	4	0.841	1.816	0.38	0.03	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.05	0.40
	5	0.520	2.309	0.02	0.63	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.68	0.01
	6	0.408	2.608	0.48	0.14	0.00	0.84	0.00	0.01	0.06
	7	0.053	7.251	0.00	0.00	0.97	0.00	0.97	0.00	0.00

a. Dependent Variable: happiness score

According to the results in Table 4, there is no multicollinearity among the selected independent variables, indicating that the independent variables are independent of each other, eliminating any potential impact of intercorrelation among the independent variables on the model results.

## 5. Conclusion and Policy Suggestions

### 5.1. Conclusion

According to the research findings, social security, social trust, and social needs all significantly affect the happiness of urban migrant workers. Specifically, purchasing urban basic medical insurance can enhance the happiness of migrant workers, and owning property and vehicles also has a positive impact on their happiness. Additionally, satisfaction with the surrounding natural environment and harmonious interactions with neighbors can also increase the happiness of migrant workers.

### 5.2. Policy Suggestions

(1) Strengthen the construction of the social security system. Accelerate the establishment of a sound system of social insurance, social assistance, and social welfare for migrant workers, taking into full consideration their unique characteristics such as income levels and geographical distribution. The government should continuously improve the social security system for urban migrant workers, including medical insurance, pension insurance, unemployment insurance, etc., to ensure that migrant workers can receive timely and effective assistance in case of illness, unemployment, and other emergencies, thereby enhancing their level of happiness.

(2) Foster an atmosphere of social trust. Efforts from all sectors of society are needed to promote the establishment and strengthening of social trust through measures such as education and public opinion guidance. At the same time, efforts should be made to strengthen the rule of law, uphold social fairness and justice, reduce the spread of negative information, enhance the trust of urban migrant workers in society, and thereby enhance their happiness.

(3) Implement relevant housing security measures. Promote relevant housing security measures, expand the implementation of housing security for migrant workers, enabling more migrant workers to contribute to urban development and share the fruits of

social development. This will not only increase the willingness of migrant workers to stay in cities but also help them integrate into urban life. By providing housing subsidies and increasing migrant workers' ability to afford market rental housing, their period of residence in cities can be extended, enabling them to truly integrate into urban life.

## Funding

National Undergraduate Innovation Training Program “An Empirical Exploration of the Dilemma Faced by Rural Migrant Workers Unable to Settle Peacefully in the City and Unable to Settle Comfortably in the Countryside from the Perspective of Behavioral Economics” (202210555038).

## References

- [1] Report on Migrant Workers Monitoring and Survey in 2022. (2023, May 4). China Information News, 002.
- [2] Zhang, C. W., Zhao, W., & Li, B. B. (2022). The Phenomenon of Migrant Workers and Its Economic Logic. *Economic Research*, 57(03), 9-20.
- [3] Gao, Z. Y. (2021). Analysis of Urban Settlement Intention and Influencing Factors of Migrant Workers (Unpublished master's thesis). Lanzhou University.
- [4] Zheng, F. H., Lu, Y. F., & Qin, L. (2015). Public Happiness Index: Why Is Happiness Higher Than Satisfaction? *Journal of Public Management*, 12(02), 68-82+156.
- [5] Zhang, B., & Zhou, E. Y. (2017). Research on the Influencing Factors and Countermeasures of Happiness of New Generation Migrant Workers. *Zhejiang Social Sciences*, (01), 146-154+160.
- [6] Furdyna, H. E., Tucker, M. B., & James, A. D. (2008). Relative Spousal Earnings and Marital Happiness Among African American and White Women. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2, 332-344.
- [7] Zhan, J., & Zhao, Y. (2018). Health Status, Community Social Capital, and Subjective Well-being of the Elderly in Unit Communities. *Population and Economics*, (03), 67-80.
- [8] Lu, H. Y., & Zhang, M. (2020). Integration Strategy, Discrimination Perception, and Happiness of Migrant Workers—Based on Survey Data of 2393 Migrant Workers in Fujian Province. *Social Development Research*, 7(02), 90-109+243-244.
- [9] Hu, H. S., & Lu, Y. P. (2012). Public Expenditure and Subjective Well-being of Farmers: An Empirical Analysis Based on CGSS Data. *Finance and Trade Economics*, (10), 23-33+122.
- [10] Xu, S. L., & Li, Y. F. (2019). Measurement and Analysis of Personality Characteristics of Residents in China—Based on Data from China Family Panel Studies. *China Statistics*, (08), 31-35.
- [11] Li, S., & Zhu, M. B. (2023). Income Redistribution Effects of China's Social Security System: Some New Findings. *Social Security Review*, 7(01), 46-62.
- [12] Huang, D. P., & Wang, G. P. (2021). Empirical Analysis of the Impact of Social Integration on the Urbanization Willingness of Migrant Workers—Based on the 2016 China Migrant Population Dynamic Monitoring Survey. *Northwest Population*, 42(03), 12-22.
- [13] Tian, B. H., & Geng, Y. H. (2013). Study on the Social Interaction between Migrant Workers and Citizens and Its Impact on the Psychological Integration of Migrant Workers. *Learning and Practice*, (07), 97-107.
- [14] Tang, S., & Feng, J. (2015). Cohort Differences in the Urban Settlement Intentions of Rural Migrants: A Case Study in Jiangsu Province, China. *Habitat International*, (49), 357-365.
- [15] Liu, L. (2019). Analysis of Factors Affecting the Settlement Willingness of Floating Population: High Housing Segregation or Community Social Capital. *Journal of Hohai University*, (1), 87-96+108.
- [16] Zhao, K. (2018). The Impact of Urban Settlement on the Happiness of Migrant Workers and Its Generational Differences. *Science Decision*, (04), 54-70.
- [17] Yin, J., & Liu, Y. W. (2017). The Impact of Job Transition on the Urban Settlement Intention of Migrant Workers. *Urban Issues*, (04), 70-76.
- [18] KARL E CASE, & JOHN M QUIGLEY. (2008). How Housing Booms Unwind: Income Effects, Wealth Effects, and Feedbacks Through Financial Markets. *European Journal of Housing Policy*, 2, 161-180.
- [19] Lin, J., & Zhou, S. J. (2012). Urban Housing Prices, Housing Property Rights, and Subjective Well-being. *Finance and Trade Economics*, 5, 114-120.
- [20] Li, T., Shi, P. Y., & Chen, B. K. (2011). Housing and Happiness: Chinese Urban Residents' Housing Issues from the Perspective of Happiness Economics. *Economic Research*, 9, 70-82.