

Migrant Workers' Housing Effects on Their Urban Adaptation: An Empirical Case Study of the Wuling Mountains Area in China

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It is a unique feature of China's urbanization and a must for migrant workers to integrate into cities. Migrant workers can be integrated into urban life quickly if their housing problem is adequately addressed. However, resolving the housing problem is one of the critical challenges in migrant workers' urban adaptation. This paper defines an urban transformation from economic, social, psychological, and cultural dimensions and analyzes it from housing facilities, housing performance, supporting facilities, and community environment. Structural equation modeling explores the path between housing and migrant workers' urban adaptation in the Wuling Mountains area and its impact on their urban adaptation. Then, it proposes suggestions for the government, community, enterprises, and migrant workers from different perspectives to guide the solution to migrant workers' housing difficulties and facilitate their urban adaptation.

Keywords: migrant workers, urban adaptation, urbanization, housing

INTRODUCTION

Based on the theoretical research, this paper aims to study and define migrant workers' urban adaptation in China from economic, social, psychological and cultural aspects. Economic Adaptation means that migrant workers have accumulated some financial resources in the city and have a stable income to support their expenses. Cultural Adaptation indicates that migrant workers can adapt to the local cultural customs and live, socialize, and work in the city without obstacles. Social Adaptation means that migrant workers can access social benefits and have a group of friends like locals. Psychological Adaptation shows that migrant workers recognize the city and their adaptation to the city.

Since the reform and opening, China's urban and rural areas have developed with scissors differences. Many farmers entered the cities driven by the gap between the urban and rural areas and started their life as migrant workers, contributing a substantial demographic dividend to China's urbanization. In 2021, the number of rural migrant workers reached 292.51 million in China, accounting for 20.7% of the national population and occupying a significant position in urbanization (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Currently, most migrant workers are still marginalized in daily life in cities and hardly integrate into the city. The living facilities of migrant workers in the construction industry, described as dirty, disorderly and

destructive, do not fit in with the city. Many scholars have defined migrant workers' urban adaptation from economic, social, psychological and cultural dimensions and considered their prospects worrying. In contrast, the central and western regions have not yet met the standard of transforming migrant workers into citizens, falling behind the overall level of urbanization in China (Guo et al., 2019).

Migrant workers are integrated into cities in a progressive manner. Therefore, we need to consider the micro-, meso- and macro-levels, including migrant workers' conditions, the capacity of urban society to accommodate migrant workers and the inclination of relevant policies (Li, 2021). The constraints to accelerating migrant workers' urban adaptation must be highlighted. Some scholars argue that housing severely constraints migrant workers' social transformation. The difficulty in access to stable housing represents that migrant workers' human and social capital is negated, and they are recognized as marginalized in cities (Han and Liang, 2021).

According to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China must protect the people's fundamental interests and improve their well-being. Also, China must do a better job of seeing that the gains of modernization benefit all our people fairly. Meeting the Chinese people's housing needs is an important decision in developing people's livelihoods, and its functional and rights-based benefits are irreplaceable for migrant workers' urban Adaptation (Li and Zhang, 2020). Stable and long-term housing benefits can satisfy migrant workers' housing needs, and the social welfare attached to the housing is a recognition of migrant workers' urban adaptation. However, at this stage, migrant workers live in low-quality housing in cities and can hardly access quality housing (Zhang, Tan and Chen, 2021). As the new generation of migrant workers grows, the dormitories and construction sheds provided by enterprises can no longer meet their requirements for family-style housing (Ren and He, 2022). Migrant workers are more concerned about housing facilities, space, and location.

Despite the wealth of research on migrant workers' urban adaptation, there is little research on the housing factors in their urban adaptation. The studies have focused on economically developed areas. However, the high housing prices in economically developed areas have prevented migrant workers from meeting their housing needs. Moreover, few studies investigate economically backward ethnic areas with many migrant workers. Given this, the Wuling Mountains area, located at the intersection of the two strategies of western development and the rise of central China, was selected for this study. The area's linked economic and industrial development attracts migrant workers from the west and central China. In addition, the site is a priority for national poverty alleviation, with a low threshold for urban household registration and high housing availability. Thus, it can effectively address migrant workers' transformation into urban inhabitants in the vicinity of their hometowns and has practical implications for promoting urbanization in the area.

Model Hypotheses and Data Analysis

We should analyze urban adaptation from different perspectives. Migrant workers' urban adaptation means that migrant workers acquire a certain economic base and adapt to local social and cultural customs and lifestyles in their place of work. Moreover, when truly integrated into urban lives, they behave and spend similarly as urban residents and recognize their position in cities. Given this, migrant workers' adaptation can be classified into psychological adaptation, economic adaptation, cultural adaptation, and social adaptation (Li, 2021).

Research Hypotheses and Model Building

Migrant workers' urban adaptation should be determined by migrating their families and considering their social Adaptation (Guan and Dong, 2022). They can finally be integrated psychologically into cities, measured from economic, social, and psychological dimensions (Si and Meng, 2022). Furthermore, they are integrated into cities by transforming themselves into urban inhabitants. Because of this, their ability and intention to incorporate into the city should be considered, and their transformation into urban inhabitants should be achieved from social, psychological, economic, and cultural levels (Xiong, 2021) (Table 1).

TABLE 1
URBAN ADAPTATION INDEX SYSTEM

Index	Question description
Economic	I can afford all the expenses in the city
Social	Local people are willing to accept me as a member of the community
Psychological	I feel that I am already a local
Cultural	I can adapt to the local culture and customs

Urban housing is a place of living for migrant workers and a symbol of their adaptation to the city. Therefore, the study of urban housing should incorporate the architectural components of housing as well as the benefits attached to it. This paper was based on the indexes of housing conditions in The 2021 Migrant Worker Monitoring and Survey Report and Technical Standard for Performance Assessment of Residential Buildings (GB/T 50362-2005) (Ministry of Construction of the People's Republic of China, 2006). Based on the studies of Ren and He (2022), Gao and Liu (2022), and Tang (2021), we analyzed migrant workers' urban housing on residential performance and its invisible welfare. Housing facilities, performance, community environment, and supporting welfare were analyzed separately (Table 2).

TABLE 2
INDEX SYSTEM OF HOUSING FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

Primary index	Housing performance	Housing facilities	Community environment	Supporting welfare
	Housing area	Kitchen	Air quality	Supporting education facilities
Secondary index	Ventilation Lighting	Bathroom Utilities	Noise pollution Sanitation	Medical facilities Transportation facilities
	Soundproofing	Communication facilities	Greening	Recreational facilities
	Disaster prevention	Temperature control	Security administration	Community activities

Currently, most migrant workers are still in an awkward and marginal position in urban life and cannot integrate into cities, despite an urbanization rate as high as 60% in China. Urban housing serves as a place for residence and can psychologically satisfy migrant workers' sense of belonging and identity recognition. It is the primary constraint and obstacle to migrant workers' urban adaptation. The functional needs of urban housing significantly affect migrant workers' urban adaptation, and improving their living environment can effectively boost their urban Adaptation (Li and Zhang, 2020). Migrant workers are highly concerned with housing ownership and housing benefits (Yang, Yin and Zhang, 2020) and social networks (Chen and Jing, 2022) regarding urban adaptation. The supporting welfare attached to the housing, on the one hand, enables migrant workers to enjoy the welfare effects and allows them to converge with urbanites psychologically on the other.

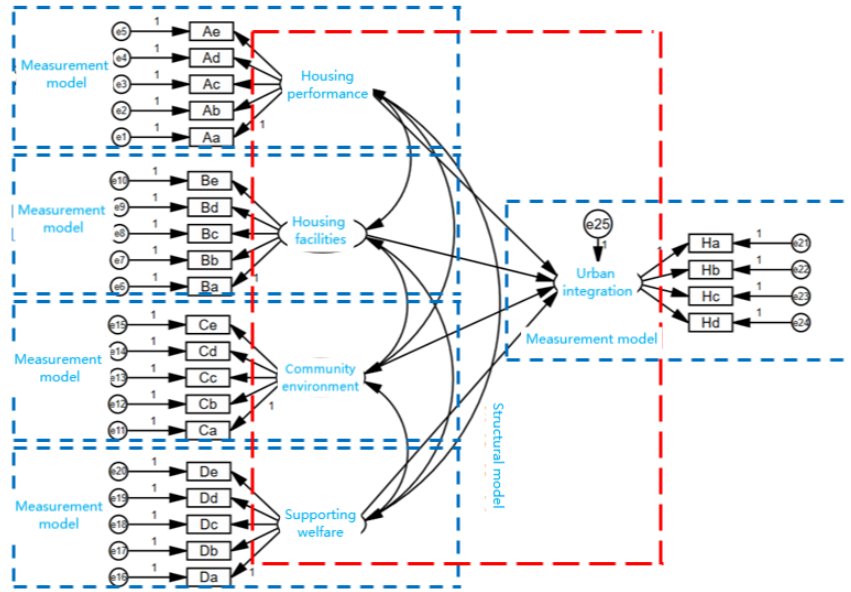
Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

- a. Housing facilities positively affect migrant workers' urban adaptation.
- b. Housing performance positively affects migrant workers' urban adaptation.
- c. Community environment positively affects migrant workers' urban adaptation.
- d. Supporting welfare positively affects migrant workers' urban adaptation.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) consists of measurement and structural models. Urban Adaptation, housing facilities, housing performance, community environment, and supporting welfare are

latent variables that cannot be measured directly, and errors can hardly be avoided in measuring many influencing factors. The observed variables can measure the latent variables, and they can also address multicollinearity and allow for a specific range of errors (Tao et al., 2021). Therefore, the structural equation model was constructed based on the research hypotheses (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1
THEORETICAL MODEL DIAGRAM**



The theoretical model consists of five measurement models and one structural model, with single-headed arrows indicating causality and double-headed arrows indicating correlation. There are 24 observed variables and five latent variables in the model. Among them, housing performance, housing facilities, community environment, and supporting welfare are exogenous latent variables, and urban adaptation is an endogenous latent variable.

Validity and Reliability Testing

Huaihua has the largest resident population in the Wuling Mountains area, but its urbanization rate was only 47.1% in 2021. At the same time, Huaihua is a crucial transportation hub and the open gateway to the southwest of Hunan to attract migrant workers better. Therefore, Huaihua city was selected as the survey site, and a questionnaire survey was conducted in construction sites, industrial parks, marketplaces and urban villages where migrant workers gather. A total of 295 questionnaires were distributed in August 2021, and 290 were returned, with 12 invalid and 278 valid questionnaires.

The confirmatory factor analysis is the first step of structural equation modeling, testing the consistency between the theoretical model and the measurement factors. The theoretical model must be tested for quality. Then the next step of empirical analysis can be carried out if its fit is satisfactory. The goodness-of-fit of the urban adaptation and urban housing index systems constructed in the previous paper was tested by confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS. According to the constructed urban housing and urban Adaptation indexes, migrant workers' urban adaptation was defined from economic, social, psychological, and cultural aspects, and confirmatory factor analysis was thus conducted. The goodness-of-fit results of the main indexes of urban adaptation and urban housing are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3
GOODNESS-OF-FITNESS ANALYSIS OF URBAN HOUSING AND
URBAN ADAPTATION INDEXES

Statistic of test	Criteria	Urban housing	urban adaptation	Goodness-of-fit
CMIN/DF	< 3.0	2.283	2.409	Yes
RMR	<0.05 as excellent fit, acceptable fit	<0.08 as 0.061	0.029	Yes
RMSEA	<0.05 as excellent fit, acceptable fit	<0.08 as 0.064	0.036	Yes
GFI	>0.90 as excellent fit, acceptable fit	>0.80 as 0.861	0.993	Yes
AGFI	>0.90 as excellent fit, acceptable fit	>0.80 as 0.894	0.963	Yes
NFI	>0.90 as excellent fit, acceptable fit	>0.80 as 0.901	0.985	Yes
RFI	>0.90 as excellent fit, acceptable fit	>0.80 as 0.869	0.956	Yes
IFI	>0.90 as excellent fit, acceptable fit	>0.80 as 0.827	0.991	Yes
TLI	>0.90 as excellent fit, acceptable fit	>0.80 as 0.899	0.974	Yes
CFI	>0.90 as excellent fit, acceptable fit	>0.80 as 0.826	0.991	Yes
PGFI	> 0.5	0.594	0.619	Yes
PNFI	> 0.5	0.691	0.728	Yes
PCFI	> 0.5	0.713	0.733	Yes

The main indexes of urban adaptation and urban housing passed the test, and the model had high goodness-of-fit, indicating the high quality of the questionnaire design. The confirmatory factor analysis models for migrant workers' urban adaptation and urban housing are shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

FIGURE 2
CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS MODEL FOR URBAN ADAPTATION

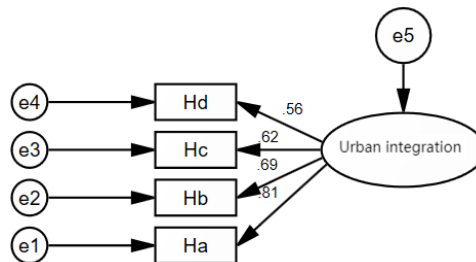
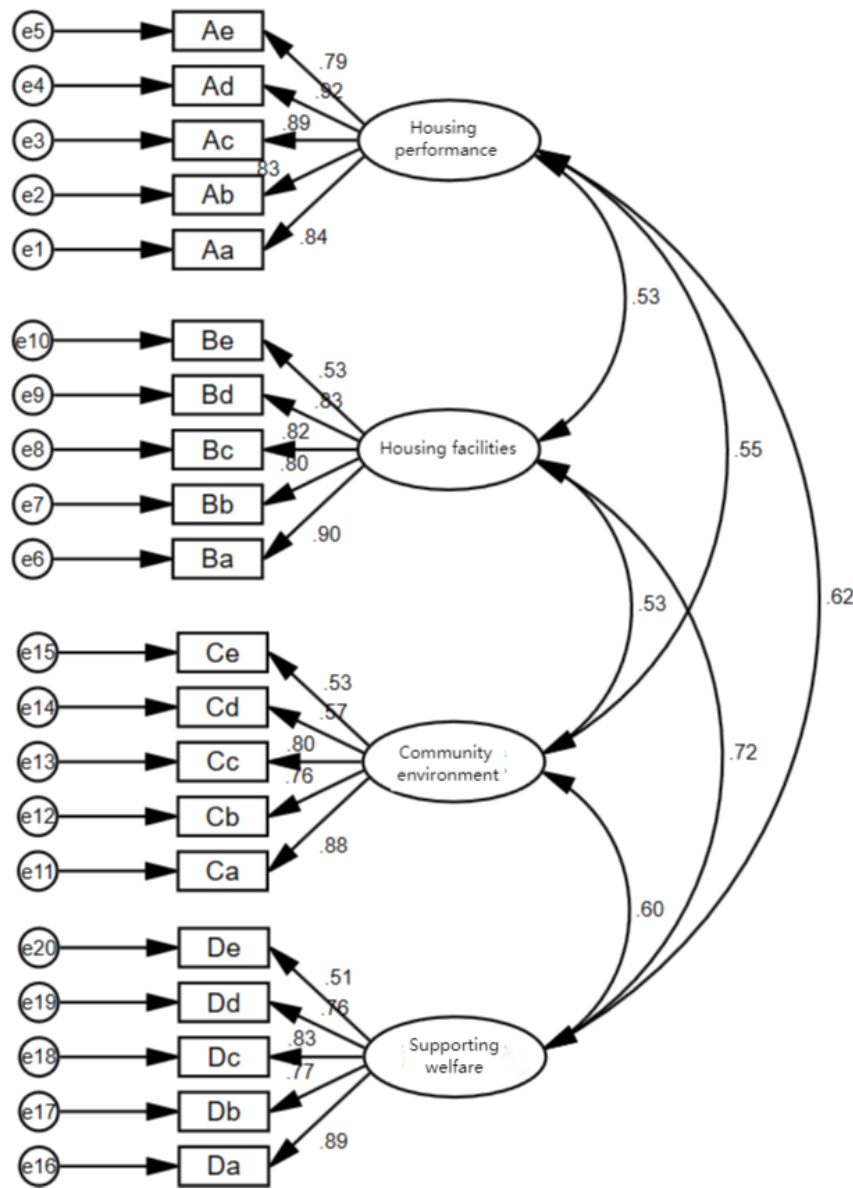


FIGURE 3
CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS MODEL FOR URBAN HOUSING



Figures 2 and 3 show that the factor loadings of urban adaptation, housing facilities, housing performance, community environment, supporting welfare, and all observed variables were more significant than 0.5 but less than 0.95. The factor loadings of the model were more critical than 0.5 but less than 0.95, indicating a high validity of the model. The two models fit well and meet the following structural equation model testing requirements.

Result Analysis

Model fitting is a prerequisite for model correction and hypothesis testing. Firstly, the parameter estimation method is used to observe whether the error variance’s SE is positive. Then, the overall model fit is examined according to the goodness-of-fit index. Also, the E-value of the standardized coefficient should not exceed 0.95. If the model satisfies both requirements, it does not violate the estimation, and its assessment meets the essential criteria.

Model Fitting

The questionnaire data were imported into the algorithm using AMOS, and the model estimation results are shown in Table 4. The standardized coefficients of each path did not exceed 0.95, and the error variance values were all positive. It indicates that the model estimation meets the basic requirements, and the overall model fit can be tested based on the goodness-of-fit index (Table 4).

TABLE 4
COEFFICIENTS AND TESTS OF THE CAUSAL PATHS OF THE MODEL

Path		Non-E	S.E	CR	P	E
Urban Adaptation	← Housing performance	0.312	0.045	6.963	***	0.296
Urban Adaptation	← Housing facilities	0.213	0.040	5.267	***	0.248
Urban Adaptation	← Community environment	0.205	0.039	5.234	***	0.218
Urban Adaptation	← Supporting welfare	0.469	0.057	8.215	***	0.472
A1	← Housing performance	1.000				0.840
A2	← Housing performance	0.951	0.051	18.679	***	0.832
A3	← Housing performance	1.036	0.049	20.973	***	0.891
A4	← Housing performance	1.076	0.049	22.084	***	0.918
A5	← Housing performance	0.946	0.056	17.030	***	0.785
B1	← Housing facilities	1.000				0.904
B2	← Housing facilities	0.824	0.044	18.739	***	0.795
B3	← Housing facilities	0.923	0.046	19.980	***	0.823
B4	← Housing facilities	0.944	0.046	20.516	***	0.834
B5	← Housing facilities	0.515	0.050	10.355	***	0.532
C1	← Community environment	1.000				0.885
C2	← Community environment	0.840	0.051	16.355	***	0.770
C3	← Community environment	0.783	0.045	17.239	***	0.798
C4	← Community environment	0.599	0.055	10.880	***	0.570
C5	← Community environment	0.566	0.056	10.019	***	0.533
D1	← Supporting welfare	1.000				0.877

Path		Non-E	S.E	CR	P	E
D2	← Supporting welfare	1.007	0.058	17.353	***	0.779
D3	← Supporting welfare	0.959	0.049	19.425	***	0.833
D4	← Supporting welfare	0.849	0.051	16.658	***	0.760
D5	← Supporting welfare	0.628	0.065	9.699	***	0.510
Y1	← Urban Adaptation	1.000				0.739
Y2	← Urban Adaptation	0.771	0.061	12.546	***	0.652
Y3	← Urban Adaptation	0.872	0.069	12.711	***	0.661
Y4	← Urban Adaptation	0.858	0.069	12.425	***	0.647

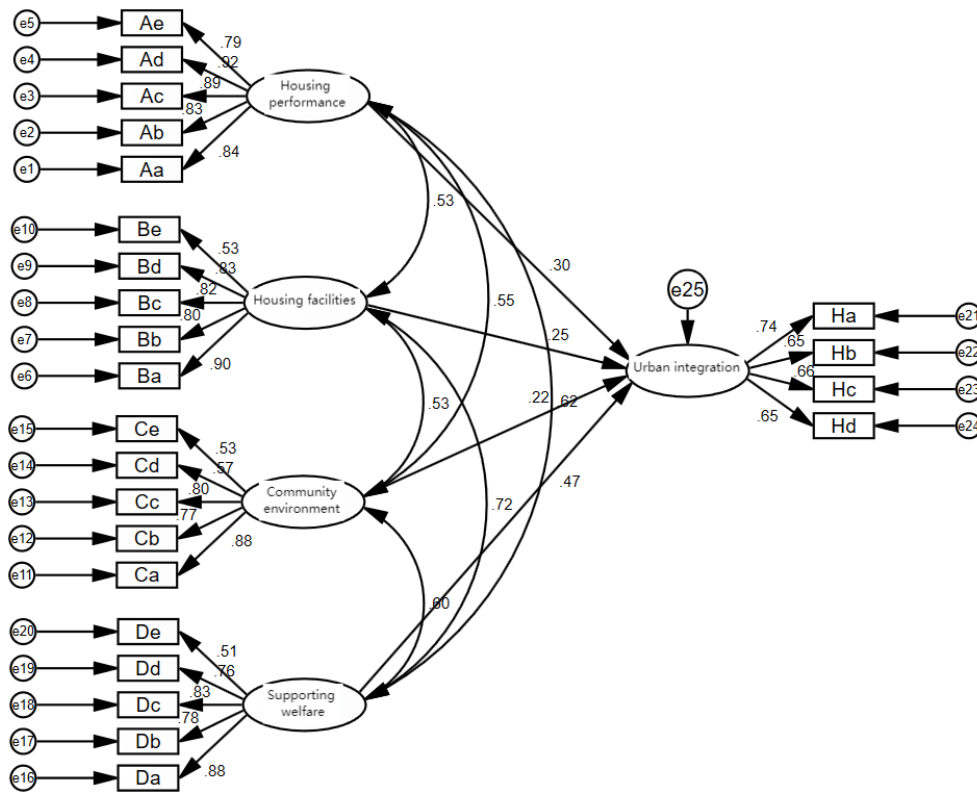
Note: * indicates $P < 0.05$, ** indicates $P < 0.01$, *** indicates $P < 0.001$

The analysis of goodness-of-fit indexes of the model is shown in Table 5, and all the indexes are well-fitted with an overall excellent fit, meeting the test criteria. The calculated structural equation model is shown in Figure 4.

TABLE 5
GOODNESS OF FIT INDICATOR ANALYSIS OF THE MODEL

Statistic of test	Criteria	Test result	Judgment of fitting
CMIN/DF	< 2.0	1.896	Yes
RMR	<0.05 as excellent fit, <0.08 as acceptable fit	0.072	Yes
RMSEA	<0.05 as excellent fit, <0.08 as acceptable fit	0.076	Yes
GFI	>0.90 as excellent fit, >0.70 as acceptable fit	0.814	Yes
AGFI	>0.90 as excellent fit, >0.70 as acceptable fit	0.791	Yes
NFI	>0.90 as excellent fit, >0.70 as acceptable fit	0.915	Yes
RFI	>0.90 as excellent fit, >0.70 as acceptable fit	0.889	Yes
IFI	>0.90 as excellent fit, >0.70 as acceptable fit	0.849	Yes
TLI	>0.90 as excellent fit, >0.70 as acceptable fit	0.856	Yes
CFI	>0.90 as excellent fit, >0.70 as acceptable fit	0.923	Yes
PGFI	> 0.5 as an acceptable fit	0.682	Yes
PNFI	> 0.5 as an acceptable fit	0.715	Yes
PCFI	> 0.5 as an acceptable fit	0.743	Yes

FIGURE 4
STRUCTURAL DIAGRAM OF THE MODEL



Hypothesis Testing

The hypothesis test should be judged according to the significance of the primary path. We should observe whether the P-value is below 0.05, and the critical ratio (CR) should be greater than 1.96. A path is considered significant if it meets the above criteria. The principal path coefficients of the model were extracted for hypothesis testing, as shown in Table 5. For the path of housing performance→urban adaptation, the P-value was less than 0.001, and the CR was 6.963. For every unit increase in housing performance, migrant workers' urban adaptation increased by 0.296 units. For the path of housing facilities→urban adaptation, the P-value was less than 0.001, and the CR was 5.267. For each unit increase in housing facilities, migrant workers' urban adaptation increased by 0.248 units. For the path of community environment→urban adaptation, the P-value was less than 0.001, and the CR was 8.215. For each unit increase in the community environment, migrant workers' urban adaptation increased by 0.218 units. For the path of supporting welfare→urban adaptation, the P-value was less than 0.001, and the CR value was 8.215. For each unit increase in supporting welfare, migrant workers' urban adaptation increased by 0.472 units. The p-values for all four paths were less than 0.05, and the CR values were more significant than 1.96, indicating that all four paths were substantial. Therefore, hypotheses a-d were true.

The coefficients of the four critical paths show that housing performance, housing facilities, community environment, and supporting welfare affect migrant workers' urban adaptation significantly. Supporting welfare has the highest path coefficient, followed by housing performance and facilities, and community environment has the smallest coefficient. Supporting welfare concerns housing-related issues such as children's schooling, medical care, transportation, and daily activities. Due to the solidified urban-rural dichotomy in China, housing is currently considered a shelter for most families. To integrate into the city, migrant workers must change their household registration status and, more importantly, cultural identity. They should be integrated into city life and behave and think similarly to citizens.

Furthermore, it is the behavioral foundation for them to access education for their children, medical services, transportation, and daily activities like other citizens. Migrant workers need their families to be integrated into cities, so the supporting welfare of housing is paramount. Housing performance and facilities are internal housing factors and occupy an important position in migrant workers' urban adaptation.

As a unique commodity, housing is a symbol of social status. Most migrant workers have no fixed residence in the city or live in worker dormitories, construction slabs, low-cost housing, or urban villages with poor living conditions and incomplete housing facilities. Because of this, migrant workers are psychologically alienated from the city. Given this, they require housing to meet their living needs, and they want a more comfortable and convenient place for their families. The community environment has a minor influence on urban adaptation among the housing-related indexes. The community environment refers to the greenery, sanitation, safety, air, noise and other factors of the neighborhood they live in. Requirements for the quality of surroundings of housing represent the psychological recognition and satisfaction of their status. Migrant workers perceive less about the community environment because their essential living quality is not up to standard. Therefore, they are more concerned about the internal rate of housing and the convenience of work and life from housing but have lower demands for psychological satisfaction outside of housing. However, as other conditions of migrant workers in the city improve, they require more and more from the community environment. Thus, the community environment has a minor effect on urban adaptation compared with other paths.

CONCLUSION

Migrant workers' urban adaptation, a long-term systematic project of economic and social development, regards residential adaptation as the starting point of urban transformation and addresses the challenges of meeting the housing needs of all Chinese people. Moreover, it is undoubtedly crucial to accelerate China's urbanization by promoting migrant workers' transformation into urban inhabitants. In this paper, we conducted a path analysis on housing facilities, housing performance, supporting welfare and community environment that affect urban adaptation in the economically backward Wuling Mountains area. It was found that residential and rights-based housing functions affect urban adaptation, with supporting welfare having the most substantial influence, followed by housing performance, housing facilities, and community environment. Given China's current housing situation, we propose appropriate policy recommendations based on the study's results.

Housing is both functional and rights-based. It is a shelter for migrant workers in the city and a basis for their entitlement to social welfare and participation in social activities. We need to work together with the government, businesses, communities and migrant workers to improve the quality of housing and the housing environment from the two main properties of housing. We must also put migrant workers' demand for urban housing into practice. In this way, we can effectively support migrant workers' urban adaptation.

(1) The Chinese government should provide policy support related to supporting welfare in housing and accelerate the implementation of policies. The government should make policies to favor migrant workers' access to housing and corresponding school districts. It should improve the overall housing quality of cities by promoting the renovation of dilapidated houses, old houses and urban villages and launching the application procedures for public housing and low-cost housing for migrant workers to reduce the difficulty of the housing application. At the same time, the government should refine the system of equal benefits for tenants and home buyers to protect the social welfare of migrant workers as tenants. On the other hand, the government should accelerate the implementation of the school district policy to ensure that migrant workers' children have access to education and top schools.

(2) Enterprises should actively build high-quality employee dormitories to enhance migrant workers' sense of belonging to the city. Employee dormitories should meet employees' housing needs and be safe, comfortable and satisfying for employees. Moreover, enterprises should apply for school places to enable migrant workers' children to study in the city. Based on this, migrant workers' family members can feel free to move into the city. In addition, enterprises should regularly organize activities such as mutual help, friendship and political study to enhance migrant workers' sense of achievement and belonging.

(3) Communities should establish a friendly environment to facilitate migrant workers' urban adaptation. Communities should treat every landlord and tenant fairly and build a friendly atmosphere. Moreover, communities should launch regular cultural and recreational activities to enhance neighborhood relations and actively guide and assist migrant workers to participate in and use intelligent communities.

(4) Migrant workers should continuously improve their comprehensive quality and enhance their hard and soft power. They should be aware of improving their skills, actively participating in skills training and upgrading their economic strength to become more integrated into cities. At the same time, they should follow current affairs and politics, learn the latest policies, and actively fight for and protect their rights and interests.

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