

Does It Matter Which Parent is Absent?:

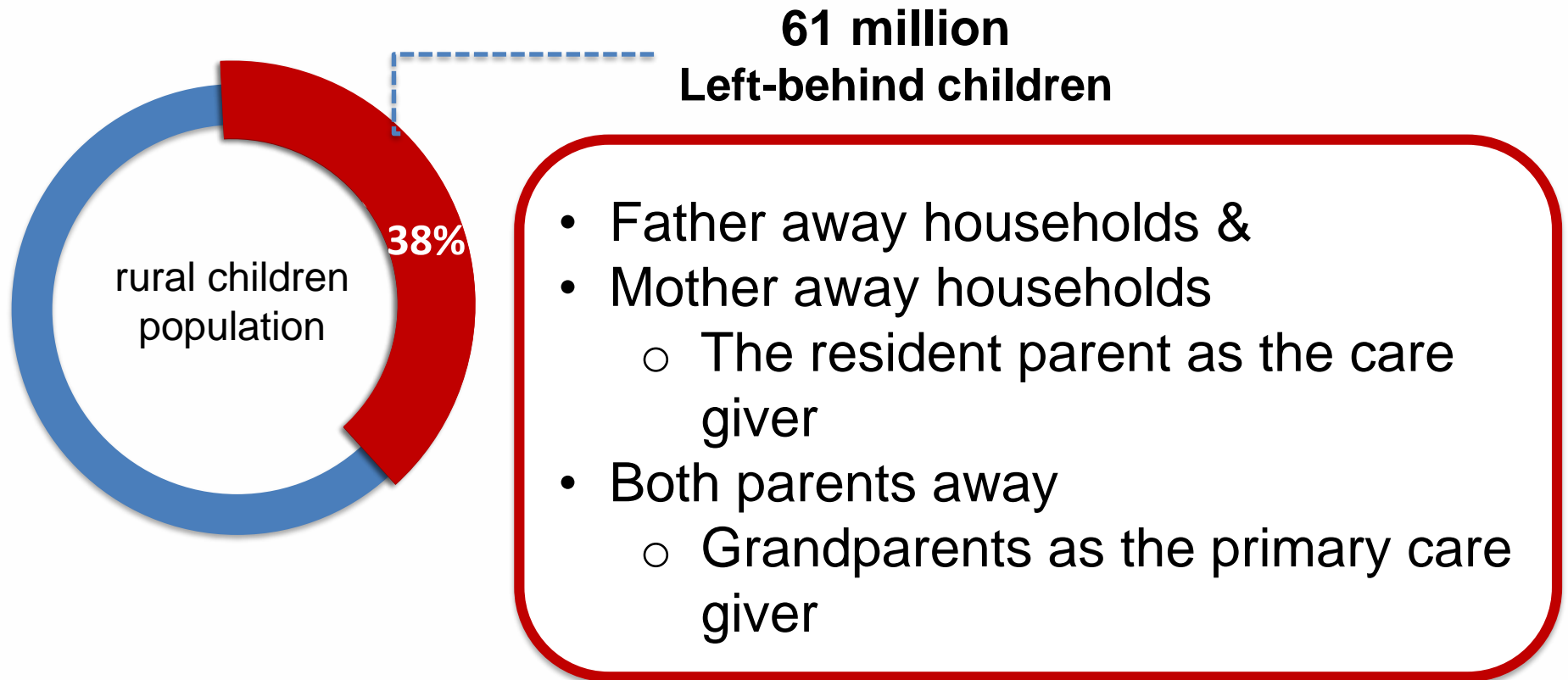
Labor Migration and Adolescent Development in Rural China

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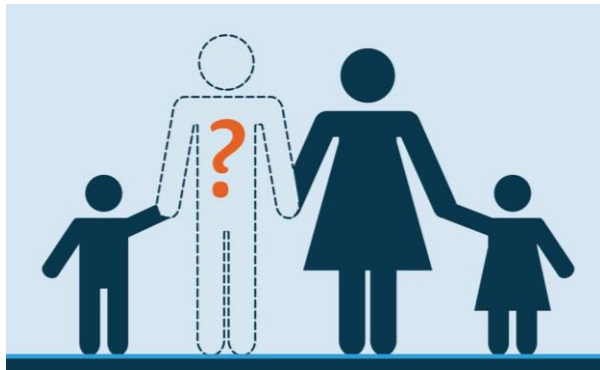
Research Context

- Labor migration in rural China



What do we know about parental absence?

- Most research focuses on divorce-induced father absence in developed countries



- Lower academic performance
- Poorer psychological adjustment
- Lower self-esteem
- More behavioral problems
- Less social competence
- Gender-specific outcomes (e.g., teen pregnancy)
- Mixed results on cognitive ability

Emerging research on migration-induced absence

- Left-behind children in general are more disadvantaged in emotional well-being, health, and educational performance
- Disaggregation of different types of parental absence--
Limited evidence:
 - Fathers' migration has positive impact on educational attainment, while mothers' does not (Lu, 2012).
- Few study examines what drives the **differential** impacts

Research Questions

1. Whether and how different types of parental absence relate to a wide range of adolescents' developmental outcomes?
2. What drives the differential impacts (if anything)?

Data

- China Education Panel Study
 - Nationally representative data
 - Seventh and ninth graders in 2013-2014 AY
 - Rich information on developmental outcomes, as well as family and school contexts

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- China Education Panel Study
 - Nationally representative data
 - Seventh and ninth graders in 2013-2014 AY
 - Rich information on developmental outcomes, as well as family and school contexts
- Analytic sample
 - 7000 rural children (who did not themselves migrate)

Measure

- Outcomes measures
 - Academic achievement (school test scores)
 - Cognitive ability (standardized test)
 - Depressive symptom (clinical student survey)
 - Expected years of schooling (student survey question)
 - Confidence about future (student survey question)

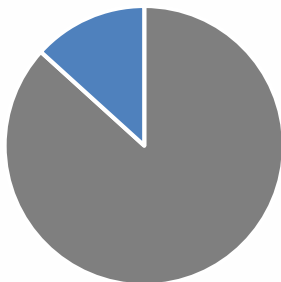
Measure

- Outcomes measures
 - Academic achievement (school test scores)
 - Cognitive ability (standardized test)
 - Depressive symptom (clinical student survey)
 - Expected years of schooling (student survey question)
 - Confidence about future (student survey question)
- Control variables
 - Students demographic information (student survey)
 - Household characteristics (parent survey)

Analytic Approach

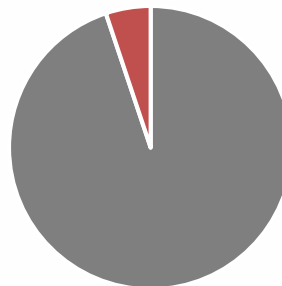
- School-by-grade fixed effects with controls
- Propensity score matching with school-by-grade fixed effects
 - Pair-wise matching

Father-away match & reference group



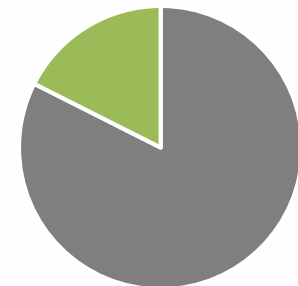
- Father-away
- Both-parents at home

Mother-away & reference group



- Mother-away
- Both-parents at home

Both-parents away & reference group



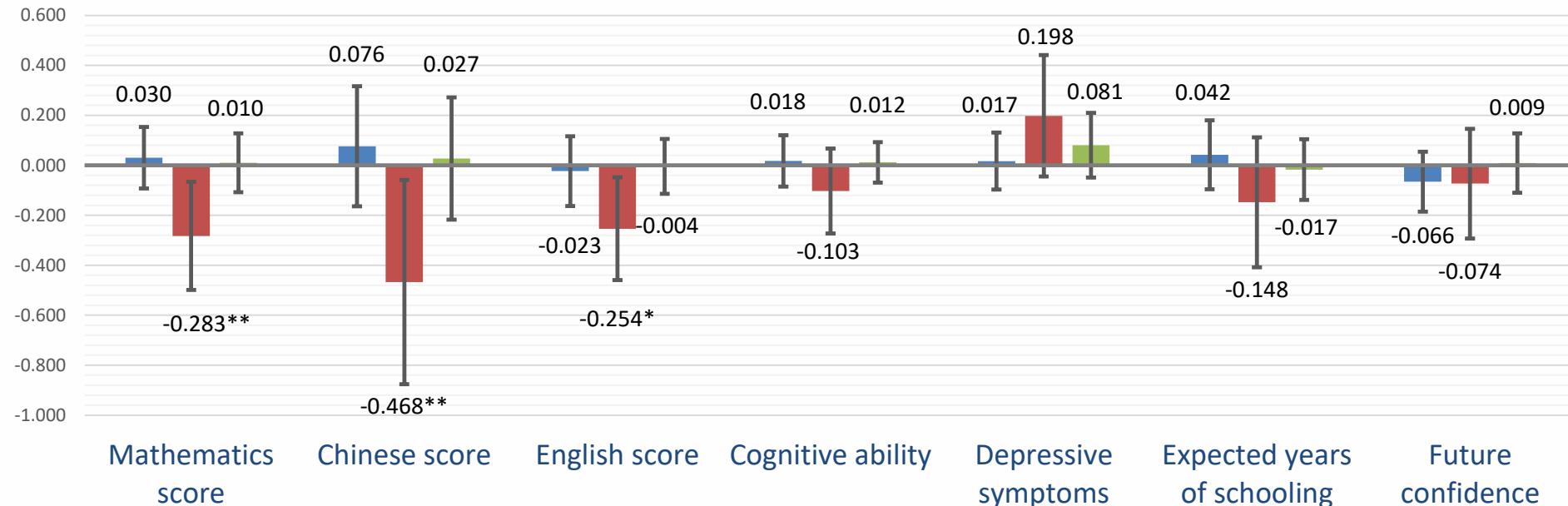
- Both-parents away
- Both-parents at home

Results

- Heterogeneous effects among three types of households on academic achievement and emotional outcomes

Estimates from FE-FSM model

■ Father-away ■ Mother-away ■ Both parents away

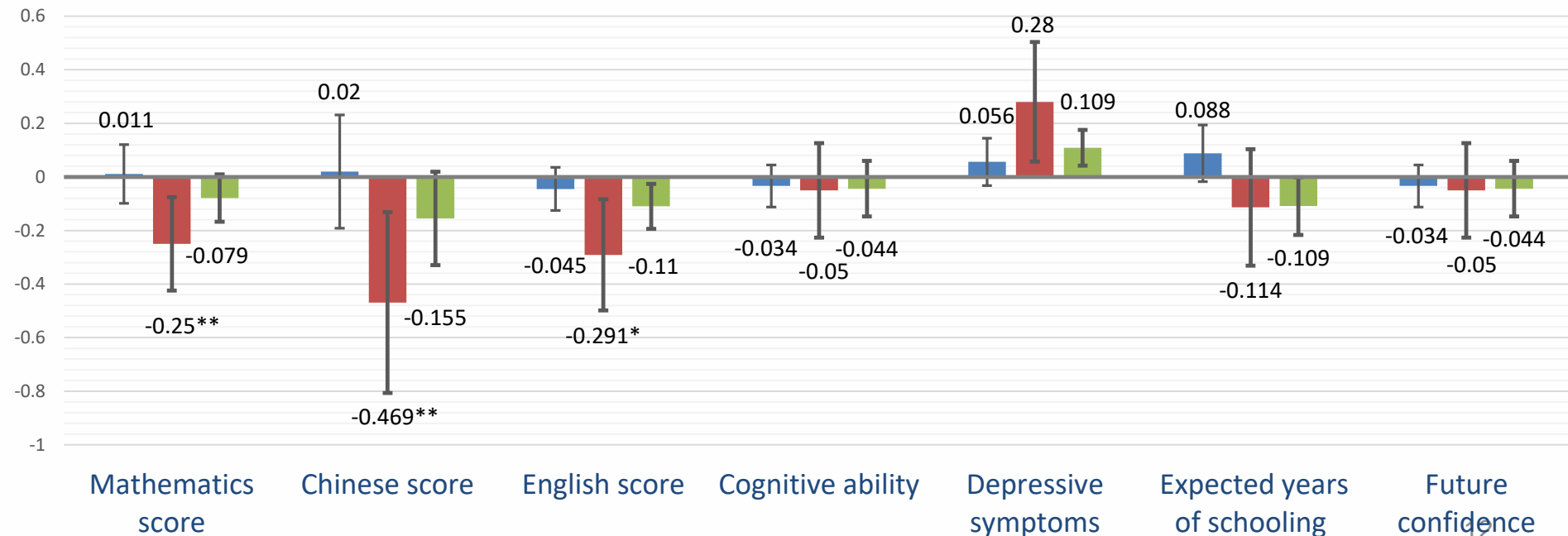


What drives the differential impacts?

- Are father-only households more at risk in the first place?
- Non-at-risk sample: stable employment, junior high graduate, no binge drinking habits, and no fights with spouse.

Estimates from the non-at-risk subsample

■ Father-away ■ Mother-away ■ Both parents-away

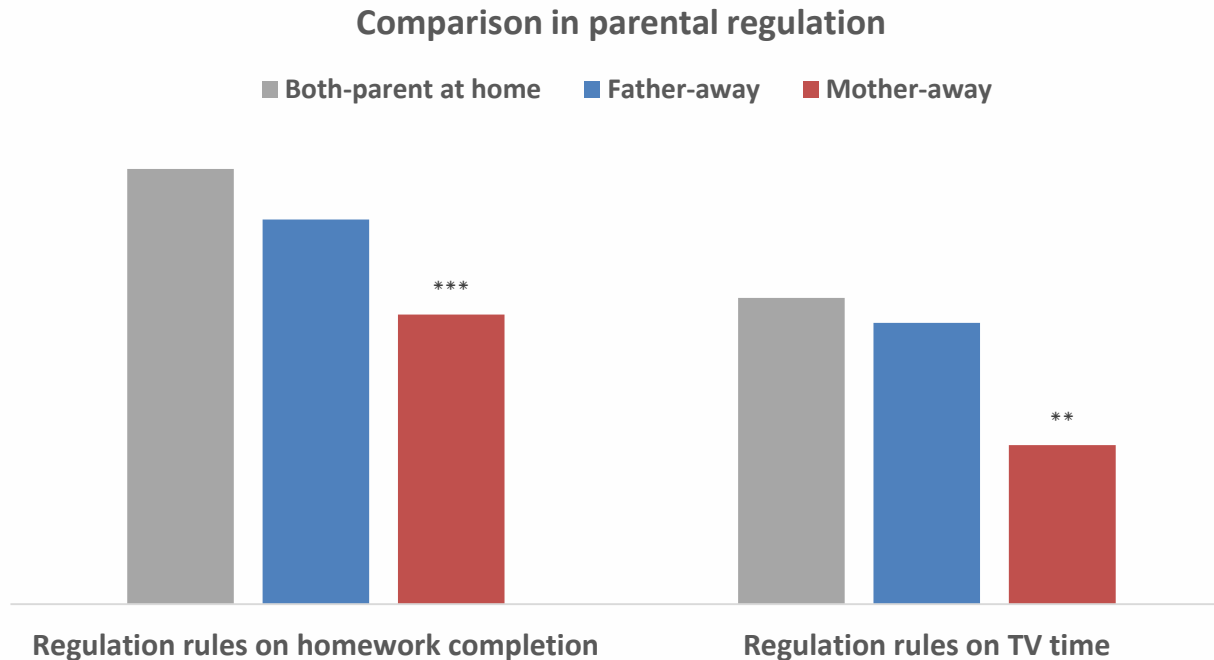


What drives the disadvantages of mother-away households?

- Parenting practices
 - Regulation rules on academic performance, socialization, and screen time
 - Parents' expectation of schooling
 - Parents' confidence about the child's future
 - Frequency of parent-child conversations
 - Frequency of parent-child co-activities
- Parent-child relationship

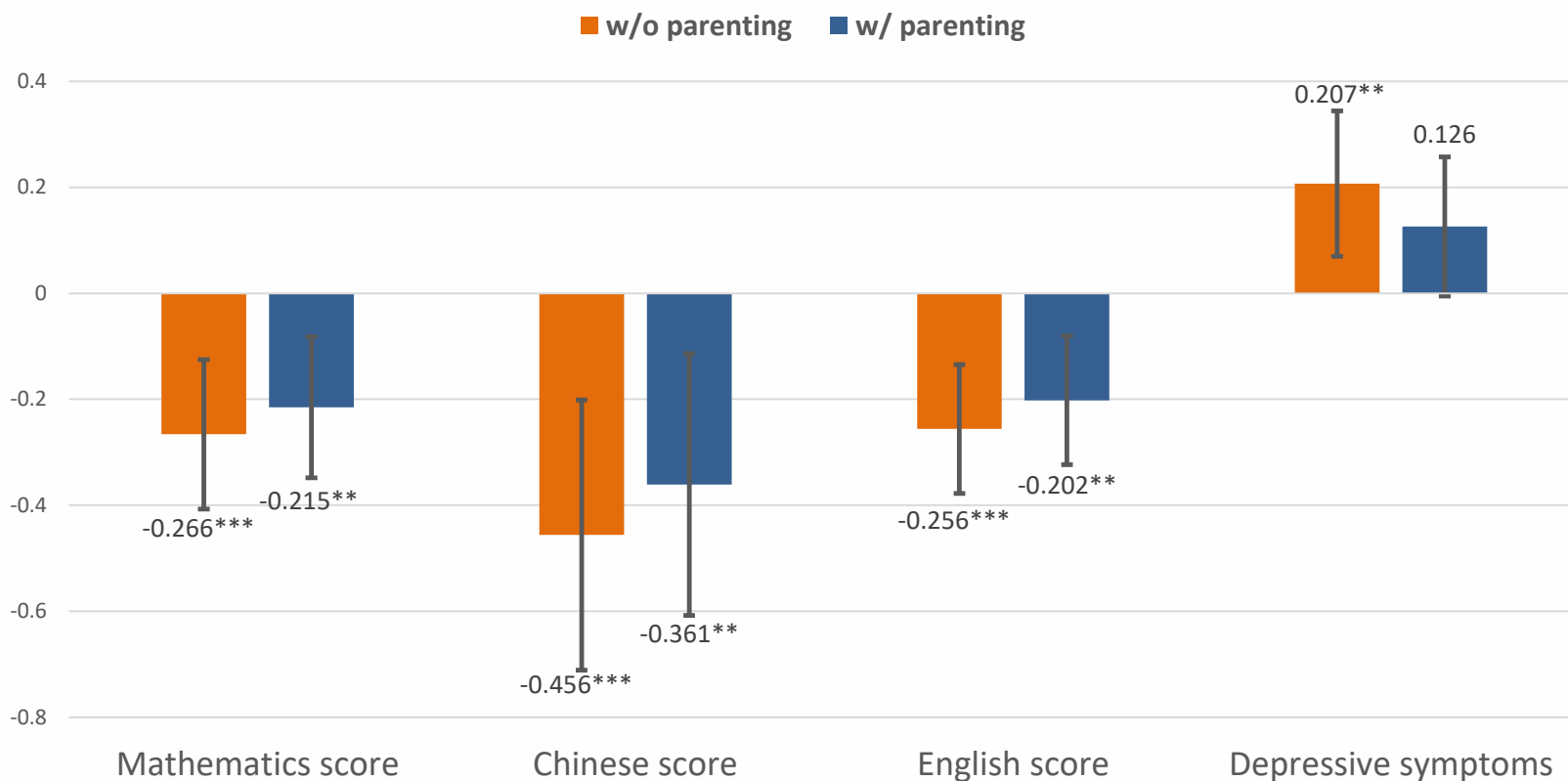
What drives the disadvantages of mother-away households?

- Differences in parenting factors in different household structures



What drives the disadvantages of mother-away households?

Coefficients w/ and w/o parenting factors



Discussion

- Differential associations between parental absence and adolescent developmental outcomes, depending on which parent migrates
- Differential associations with different domains of child development
 - Academic and emotional outcomes are more sensitive to parental absence
- Parenting factors explain much of the negative effect of mother absence

Thank you!

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