

How Does Depression Form and Develop in Chinese International Students?

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ABSTRACT

Studies show that international college students are at high risk of gaining mental issues, including depression, due to adjustment difficulties. International college students demonstrate the demands of help dealing with mental problems compared with local college students. This study indicates that stressors may form a depression in Chinese international students when studying abroad. The stressors include transcultural adjustments, academic performance, and language barrier highly correlate with depression. Then the study addresses the behavior of low-help seeking from counseling centers related to depression and suggests some solutions to help Chinese international students deal with mental issues and promote this community development in studying abroad.

Keywords: Chinese International Students, Depression, Stressors, Low-help seeking

1. INTRODUCTION

Major depressive disorder (MDD) is one of the most frequent mental diseases among college students, as well as one of the primary causes of disability worldwide [1]. College students in the transition from teenagers to adults easily face new challenges in their college life, such as academic performance, alcohol abuse, and emotional instability. At the same time, due to difficulties with the acculturation process, international students frequently have more psychological problems than local students [2].

The population of Chinese International Students studying abroad makes China becoming the largest origin of overseas students. China has the highest growth of international students, marked by a 100% rise in the population between 2008 and 2018. As of 2018, the country had more than 490,000 students across the globe [3]. Most Chinese students choose to study abroad for undergraduate study. College students are the group of people that are mainly influenced by mental problems like anxiety or depression since they are in the transition from the stage of adolescence to the stage of early adulthood. According to the 2016 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, young adults ages 18-25 had the highest prevalence of mental illness compared to older adults. To study in foreign countries, Chinese International students face challenges, such as transcultural adjustment, academic pressure, and a new

language environment. One of the most common concerns among overseas students seeking help from university counseling centers is depression [4].

Most studies primarily focus on a single stressor, such as cross-cultural transition, associated with depressive disorder. However, the single stressor may not clearly explain the formation of depression in Chinese international students. The transcultural adjustment, academic pressure, and language barriers develop depression in Chinese international students. Depression also impacts low helping-seeking from peer or professional groups. The low help-seeking from the counseling centers may exacerbate their mental health issues. Thus, the current study aims to explore the stressors related to the formation of depression among Chinese international students' community and provide some suggestions for this community.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Stressor Formation

Technological innovations and aspects of globalization have enabled access to education by students across the planet. Priority has been offered to institutions in western countries based on societal norms and perceptions that they provide the highest quality of education. The unique socio-cultural environment of the Chinese limits their interactions with foreign cultures.

Key issues facing these students are the language barrier, transcultural adjustment, and the pressure to perform academically. Thus, the implications have significantly deteriorated their mental and psychological health.

2.1.1. Transcultural Adjustment

The transition of cultures is pervasive to Chinese international students, especially among first-year students. Consider that while native students may have difficulty fitting in, the psychological distress is worse on the Asian students. Regardless, responsible institutions perceive international education as a mutually beneficial endeavor. On the one hand, institutions improve their revenue generation. On the other hand, the students can attain education worldwide [5]. Thus, while parents, guardians, and tutors may be aware of the impending psychological and mental implications, it is clear that the educational benefits outweigh this risk. There are four identified implications emanating from cultural adjustments: homesickness, cultural shock, cultural distance, and lack of social support.

Students who may have the experiences by themselves, such as traveling, still report a high risk of homesickness [6]. International students need to endure long distance and minimum physical contact with their parents. For instance, Chinese international students who attend to countries like the United States hardly go back home because of the long distance and high cost of traveling. Due to the Covid-19 impact, China polished the quarantine policies. The term of quarantine extends from 7 days to 28 days and the policy continues to adjust based on different situations. Seen in this light, Chinese international students rarely have contact with their families which may correlate with mental health, such as anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Asian and Western cultures contradict in almost every single aspect. China, for instance, reveres politeness, intelligence, and calmness. However, in western countries like the United States, individuals prioritize a more outgoing personality that emphasizes networking. The cultural constructs are noted in the socio-cultural and professional platforms [7]. Thus, students are unfamiliar with the pervasive practices that describe the norms and perceptions in the organizations. Besides, the American mainstream promotes individualism and rebellion against authority. Therefore, the new students are noted immediately, making it difficult to blend in with them. The isolation exacerbates loneliness and eventually leads to depression.

Cultural distance entails the separation from one's ethnic background. As students, a majority are used to spending time close to their friends and relatives. Students are constantly faced with psychological implications in the local setting due to their separation from friends and relatives. The effects are worse among

Chinese students as they are separated from their cultures and friends and relatives [4]. Thus, the depression emanates in the form of frustration as the students struggle to get familiar with the culture and transition to the way of life. Even the food may make the students stand out from the rest in their classes. The differences may cause possible discrimination against the students. Those unable to cope with the taunts may progressively lose their self-worth and develop depression.

The lack of social support also impairs students' mental and psychological stability, thus leading to depression. The evolution of society owing to the drastic economic and social changes have had significant implications on the younger generations [6]. For instance, the inception of technology has transformed the modes of interaction and communication between friends, acquaintances, and family members. With time, the new routine may alienate vulnerable personalities, especially introverts, from the rest of society. Once they relocate to countries in the West, they must be accountable for much of their actions. However, when with friends and relatives, individuals can cope with complex psychological implications. Unfortunately, Chinese international students may be separated from their families for up to months or years. The mental effects at this point are destructive and may result in depression.

2.1.2. Academic Performance

The education system has transformed significantly over the past century. Eastern and western education demonstrate differences in external assistance. Chinese educational systems tend to provide overwhelming services either in academic performance or students' college life. For instance, Chinese colleges tend to set up the standards for students to follow and reach their expectations. In western countries, colleges tend to show more flexibility for students. Students tend to take responsibility for themselves. Another part of the difference between eastern and western education will be parents. Chinese parents are concerning their children and expect their children to follow their suggestions. Under cultural circumstances, some Chinese students may lack independence. It may cause problems while they study abroad. They may not well arrange their class works, such as poor academic performance and future career pathways. The future effects may increase their anxiety levels, triggering the formation of depression.

With a focus on the job market, more education facilities insist on exceptional academic qualifications to maintain a position in their organization. On the other hand, renowned institutions are prioritizing high-performing students for work opportunities. The effects of these requirements have been significant psychological implications due to anxiety [6]. More students report that they are anxious that the education system in the international platform may discriminate

against minority students. Thus, they are concerned that if they fail to meet specific grades, they might not access job opportunities. These effects further deteriorate their ability to perform academically and may cause depression.

International students frequently experience tremendous stress as a result of academic pressure, which can harm their mental health [3]. These overseas students come from institutions with drastically different educational backgrounds which hardly that adjust to the new educational system [3]. Based on Chinese cultures and prior academic achievement, Chinese students show high expectations on their academic works which refers to self-critical perfectionistic performance expectations [8]. Self-critical perfectionism is closely linked to stress level. Perfectionism's influence on depression was worsened by higher stress levels [8].

Regarding academic performance, norms and perceptions in the West portray Chinese students as being highly intelligent relative to other races. The beliefs are especially true for highly sophisticated topics such as math and physics. Unfortunately, this unhealthy norm is conceivable within students and tutors. Therefore, Asian students are expected to perform better than other students in the same disciplines [6]. Failure to achieve commendable scores may lead to long-term discrimination from peers of the same race and different races. Persistence in the discrimination may cause vulnerable students to alienate from the rest of the students and tutors. Thus, they may be unable to cope with the psychological and mental distress effectively. Ultimately, they develop depression as the signs and symptoms persist in the future.

2.1.3. Language Barrier

The language barrier is a complex factor that has exacerbated the inequality in the quality of education provided for international students, including Chinese students. On the one hand, a significant portion of these students lacks fluency in English. Thus, the language may be their second or even third language. Most students may be unable to read and access content relating to their different courses easily. Thus, students find it difficult to demonstrate their intelligence and comprehension of critical concepts [7]. However, higher education requires vital thinking on essential ideas proposed in the study. Thus, each of the students must engage in each of these assignments. Besides, the more assignments students solve, the higher their competence level in the long run. Therefore, the distress builds up in the long run leading to depression.

As a second language, Chinese students have to engage other students in English despite the pervasiveness of the accent. However, the accent victimizes them to acts of discrimination and ridicule

from their peers. Furthermore, considering that Chinese cultures insist on calmness and composure, it is difficult for these students to stand up for themselves. Since they are far from their families, many have to persevere in these situations daily. The effects could cause anxiety and later depression for the victims [7]. Hence, most students lose interest in education, and their grades deteriorate. The pressure by family, tutors, and friends due to this trend further exacerbates their mental and psychological anguish. If not curbed, depression could lead to complex cardiovascular and mental conditions and even death.

2.2 Low-Help Seeking

Aside from the difficulties and stressors that correlate with Chinese international students, they may face several barriers that would prevent them from accessing the mental health service [3]. The low-help seeking from the counseling centers exacerbates the depression.

Seeking mental health support is common in some western countries. Considering the cultural differences, some Chinese schools do not offer counseling centers for students to get support. While after they attended to some western colleges, they are unaware of mental health services accessible on campus which led to an underutilization of counseling centers [3]. Although some Chinese international students aware of the counseling centers, they are rarely request help because of the language barrier, especially for first-year college students. They are afraid of describing their concerns in English or some other language use.

Another aspect related to low-help seeking from counseling centers is cultural stigma. International students are typically hesitant to seek counseling because of the stigma associated with admitting they require mental health services [3]. Seeking mental health services is sometimes considered as a sign of weakness [3]. For instance, some Chinese parents consider the behavior of seeking help from a counselling center as an excuse for students to explain their poor academic performance. One study discovered in 2014, the results indicate that international students connect the stigma with their mental health issues [3]. They may be hesitant to disclose deep personal difficulties with strangers due to the stigma associated with mental health concerns [3].

2.3 Advocacy

Affirmative actions developed in major learning institutions must offer solutions to discrimination against minority students. Such activities may include harsh punishment against students who use derogatory comments and insist on unhealthy norms and perceptions regarding minority students [9]. Consequently, affirmative action could offer lasting solutions to financially struggling students. Doing this will ensure

that they focus on their education more and reduce the stress involved in juggling different activities.

Colleges could also offer counseling services to vulnerable students. All first-year Chinese students must be counseled about the difference in cultures between the new cultural form and their countries. The sensitization will enable them to relate better to their peers despite the language barrier. The sensitization could also target native students and encourage them to adopt empathy when engaging other international students [10]. The act will challenge already established norms and perceptions that may victimize Chinese students to discrimination. Overall, it will cut down the development of depression among these students.

Meanwhile, college counseling wellness centers need to consider the language barrier for better helping Chinese international students. As aforementioned, language may influence Chinese international students seeking help from universities. Counseling centers may find some peer counselors or specialists who can speak their home language. First, the communication helps to understand the requests and their mental health issues. Second, people are willing to describe their concerns to people who speak the same language as them. Thus, considering the language barriers in counselling centers are vital action.

Cultural awareness is yet another endeavor that may enable Chinese students to cope with implications in the international platforms. Cultural awareness enables students to appreciate diversity and embrace different races, ethnic backgrounds, and beliefs. Chinese are revered for their excellent and unique socio-cultural constructs. It not only enables them to stand out, but it challenges other cultures to evaluate their society and make improvements. For instance, the US could improve aspects of morality [10]. The nation's mainstream media promotes concepts that deteriorate societal ethics and moral standards. Consequently, the Chinese could learn more from their American counterparts. The inclusion culture fosters growth and establishes strong relationships that promote psychological and mental health.

3. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

The major limitation of the present study is that chosen countries with unique cultures may trigger different stressors, such as studying abroad in Asian countries or studying in western countries like the U.K. This study may not include all the cultural aspects due to the limited research background. Additionally, the previous experience of students is associated with their adjustment while studying abroad in other countries. There are many stressors correlated with their background, such as family experiences and school

experiences. These students who are at high risk for depression may show mental issues before they study abroad.

On the other hand, most research studies rely on the students' reports. The students' report data is often biased on the scale. The survey may not demonstrate valid questions. Meanwhile, the sample size usually is small, and some are lack reliable data. The sample students with different backgrounds may report different levels of stressors associated with depression. Thus, the concern about the findings is that the study is biased toward the results and lacks accuracy.

These findings provide the following insights for future research to explore more stressors related to depression in the Chinese international students' community. To minimize bias from students' reported data, the designed questions may consider their previous experiences. Some students who study in international schools show better adaptation after studying worldwide. When designing the study, the sample size needs to focus on a similar background to decrease the bias of the study. First-year Chinese college international students who had no previous international school experiences studying broad may consider as the research target.

Due to the lack of existing research on the influences of Covid-19 on depression of Chinese international students, future findings need to collect more data from students who study abroad in these two years. Covid-19 becomes a stressor for Chinese international students studying abroad, and the concerns from their families may exacerbate anxiety levels. Therefore, the impacts of Covid-19 are closely linked to future studies on finding stressors of Chinese international students.

Considerably more work will be done to investigate the formation of a depression in comparing studies in Eastern or Western countries. Studying abroad in Asian countries may minimize the cultural shock because of the similar cultural backgrounds. Some of the research findings may not specifically demonstrate the difference in cultural shocks and adjustments. Due to the formation of depression, the depression may influence and impact Chinese international students' social life, such as social communication with other students. College counseling may help these students to decrease the impacts of depression. However, future studies need to develop more solutions based on some Chinese international students who are not aware of their depressive symptoms.

4. CONCLUSION

Progress in psychology reveals that mental and psychological implications continue to exacerbate among college students. The trends indicate that international students face the worst impact of these conditions. International students' communities show more pressure than local students. The cultural shock and

new language environment increase their level of anxiety. As among the leading international students, Chinese students have had to battle depression when accessing higher education in countries abroad. The secondary review of sources ascertains that three prominent causes exacerbate depression among international Chinese students.

These include pressure for academic excellence, transcultural adjustment, and language barrier. Each of these implications influences how the students interact with their peers and tutors. Often, their unique cultures victimize them to acts of discrimination from fellow students. The alienation from their friends and relatives makes it challenging to cope. Moreover, Chinese international students are often unaware of their mental health issues, and cultural stigma causes low-help seeking from peer and counselling centers that may exacerbate the mental health issues, such as depression. To better help the development of Chinese international students and the entire international students' community, scrutiny of current education systems is therefore necessary to ensure an equal system of education free of depression.

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