

Mental Health Status of Chinese University Students During Epidemic

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ABSTRACT

The study investigates Chinese university students about their mental health during the outbreak. The students were threatened during the epidemic, and they lacked experience in coping with this prolonged emergency. Students became increasingly prone to anxiety and depression, and their psychological states became more negative. The study also includes potential causes and recommendations to help Chinese university students achieve mental health balance during a pandemic. In the context of the pandemic, Chinese government has instituted a set of strict quarantine policies. The students' daily lives were gradually restricted, lacking social communication and interaction. As a result of the policy, the use of electronic devices has gradually increased. Students are overly focused on classroom content for long periods of time, causing fatigue. Parenting also affects students' emotions. There is a lack of attention to students' mental health due to the excessive focus on academic achievement. High expectations lead to increased stress and even anxiety and depression. The sense of panic among Chinese university students with no mature experience can rise dramatically. The psychological state is made more vulnerable by the reception of an explosion of negative news. College students also need to prepare for entering society. Restricted practical experience can make college students feel uncomfortable and unfamiliar with real work in the future. Universities need to provide more help with potential solutions. Providing platforms and professional psychology courses can improve interaction and communication. There is a clearer perception of the state of mental health. Universities can also keep track of how stressed out students are and how good their feedback is.

Keywords: *Pandemic, Chinese college students, Mental health status*

1. INTRODUCTION

The new coronary pneumonia virus is now spreading rapidly worldwide. The World Health Organization declares covid-19 a pandemic. Due to the features of the covid-19, the virus can spread human-to-human. It mainly includes direct transmission, aerosol transmission, contact transmission, and fecal-oral transmission. The numerous ways that the virus is able to spread show that covid-19 has a high speed of transmission and is able to use many routes. Although the world has developed a vaccine for the virus, new forms of the corona virus are continuously mutating. Therefore, there is still a probability of being infected with the virus after getting the vaccine. The pandemic is still affecting significant aspects of the economy, politics, and environment; in countries all over the world, these institutions are facing heavy blows and crises. During the outbreak, the infection and mortality rates increased worldwide, leaving no individual or age group safe. Overall, Covid-

19 rapidly spread worldwide, causing devastation for those who fell victim to the disease and their loved ones who were left to mourn and who still have to evade infection to this day.[1] "Covid-19 pandemic triggers 25% increase in the prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide," according to World Health Organization News [1].

The news expresses that people's mental health is threatened during the pandemic. Moreover, people are dealing with multiple stress from different. Therefore, people are gradually beginning to focus on the tendency of mental-ill health and finding solutions for psychological support.

The mental status of Chinese university students is a concern imposed by force majeure social factors. Nowadays, the lives of Chinese college students are dramatically increasing pressure and negative influence due to regulations during the pandemic. From the past research, the mental health status of Chinese students

generally has high levels of psychological stress during covid-19. There is a big challenge and threat that affects Chinese university students, whoever exist mental diseases or not. However, there are forecasting trends about a pandemic that is uncertain and time limitations. From Cambridge University Press posted "Prevalence of depressive symptoms among Chinese university students amid the COVID-19 pandemic: a systematic review and meta-analysis", the systematic review and meta-analysis pointed out the prevalence of depression among Chinese college students. The overall rate of prevalence accounted for 26%. Compared to the non-pandemic, the rate of prevalence is 23.8%. The absolute difference between the two rates (2.2%) is not a very large magnitude from the central finding. [2]. However, the result from this direct comparison should consider with caution due to the apparent heterogeneity of the methods.

Based on the percentage of data, Chinese college students are themselves at higher exposure to symptoms and potential risk of depression. On the other side, the study is not included overseas Chinese college students [2]. Thus, the purpose of the study is to assess the tendency of the mental health status of Chinese university students during the pandemic.

2. MENTAL HEALTH

2.1. Definition

The definition of *mental health status* from the World Health Organization (WHO) is "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" [3]. However, this definition has two critical factors for determining mental health: positive functions and positive feelings. There are some miscomprehends and narrowly defines between the definition of theory and the definition of the fact for mental health.

Well-being is a critical aspect of defining the mental health status, which is hard to coordinate with challenges and difficulties in real people's lifetime. Well-being is the opposite of challenges and obstacles. An environment that has challenges and difficulties even can treat as unhappy and unhealthy through the above theory of definition. However, people with mental health usually feel different emotions, including negative emotions such as sadness, fear, anger, discomfort, unhappiness, etc. Challenges and difficulties are necessary for a lifetime. Same as the positive and negative emotions are essential and need to combine as components for an indispensable lifetime.

The concept of positive functions is translated by several definitions and theories of the ability to work productivity [4], and it will lead to being an

incomprehensive conclusion. For example, people with physical unhealth have obstacles so that they cannot do their job productively and sufficiently, which is not a good definition of mental health status. On the other hand, people in China have difficulties working effectively during epidemics which is hard to contribute the society and define the positive function of mental health status.

Based on the above analysis, the definition of mental health status is affected by hedonic and eudemonic traditions, which champion positive feeling and brilliant functioning [5]. It will be excluded that some people are naturally shy, sensitive, and introverted. Also, there are some people who fight against injustice or fight discrimination and rejection from immigrants and ethnic minorities.

The definition should modify that fits every region, avoid the limitations of different cultures and ensure the critical factors for mental health status. The concept is that mental health is not only the lack of mental disease [3;4]. Positive feelings and functions are not sufficient for determining the mental health status. In "Toward a new definition of mental health," The proposed definitions are being reported below:

Mental health is the state of mind and body that enables individuals to use their abilities in harmony with the universal values of society. Mental health includes the ability to recognize, express, and modulate one's own emotions, as well as empathize with others; flexibility and ability to cope with adverse life events and function in social roles.[6]

In this new definition, the "universal values" should be explained, which make sure to use to mislead some political and the environmental society factors. The explanation refers to respect and care for oneself and other living beings; recognition of connectedness with people; respect environment; also respect for one's own and others' freedom [6].

There are a few key factors that determine people's mental health status. Basic cognitive and social skills support people's adaptation to their environment. Basic cognitive skills include the ability to pay attention, remember and organize information, solve problems, and make judgments. Social skills involve using one's own language or not using language to communicate and interact with people. Emotional regulation helps people recognize, express, and rationally regulate their emotions. Emotional regulation is considered an essential component of mental health [7]. It is assumed to be a facilitator of stress management [8]. Empathy is the ability to understand and experience other people's feelings without confusion between oneself and others, which can support people in commutation, interaction, and predicting others' purposes, feelings, and actions [9]. The flexibility to deal with urgency and adverse events

can have the ability to change to adapt to different life periods or accidents. People play a role and contribute to society; getting in touch environment is also included as an essential component for determining mental health status. It can also resist pain and find identification in society. Since people stay in society, they need to make the relationship for adapting the society and other people.

In general, the definition of mental status is proposed as a harmonious relationship between body and mind, brain, organism, and environment. It is the heavy interaction and overall experience which cannot be separated from oneself own body's feelings in its environment [10]. The disturbances of this interaction may lead to a loss of mental health balance. As a result of these disturbances, people deal with traumatic experiences, eating disorders, self-impairment, body dysmorphic disorders, or poor physical health.

2.2. Measurements

Chinese college students can develop tendencies such as depression and anxiety due to long-term emergencies such as the pandemic. The psychological status and bearing capacity of college students are generally poor. A survey was built by random sampling from May 9 to May 22, 2022, among 1586 students. The database from "Chinese college students' stress and anxiety levels under the Covid-19", the method of research is questionnaires online through WeChat.

The measurements of standardizing are included Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Patient Health Questionnaire-9 items (PHQ-9), Self-Anxiety Scale (SAS), and general situation questionnaire for collecting social measurement data [11]. Perceived Stress Scale was used to assess the stress intensity related to testers' living conditions. Patient Health Questionnaire-9 was used to diagnose depression disorders as an auxiliary tool and evaluate the severity of mental illness. SAS is reliable and valid proof to show whether students have anxiety disorders. All three tests take cumulative score systems. If scores are higher, the more severe depression or anxiety disorders that students have.

Resumption of everyday campus life has a particular psychological impact on college students. The survey enrolled 1586 students, among which the positive psychological impact accounts for 70.81% and the negative psychological impact accounts for 29.19%. The stress levels assessed by PSS-10, PHQ-9, and SAS were low, moderate, and high at 32.5%, 41.33%, and 26.17%, respectively. The detection rate of depression (PHQ-9 \geq 5) was 43.77%, and the detection rate of anxiety symptoms (SAS standard score \geq 50) was 20.60% [11]. Through the study, the resumption of study brings Chinese college students' a positive influence. However, there is still almost half the percentage of the detection

rate of depression during the pandemic. The majority of stress is moderate, and students are hard to deal with their stresses during long-term emergencies. There is an intimate connection between depression and students' experience since the resumption of study brings a positive influence. Chinese college students lack the mental abilities to withstand emergency pressure during the outbreak. While the pandemic was in remission, Students still feel that their concerns about public health emergencies increased rather than decreased, and they even suffered trauma-induced mental illnesses due to the psychological burden. Similar results were also shown in the paper called "Mental Health Among College students during the Covid-19 Pandemic in China: A 2-Wave Longitude Survey" the data shows the trend of mental health status during different time periods. From the 164,101 college students who participated in the first wave (at T1=outbreak), 68,685 (41.9%) completed the follow-up survey (at T2=remission). The prevalence of probable acute stress from T1: 34.6% to T2: 16.4%, while the rates of depressive T1is account for 21.6%. and anxiety symptoms are account for 11.4%(T1) to 14.7% (T2) [12]. From the percentage changes of acute stress, the trend was decreasing. Opposite to depression and anxiety, the percentages were increasing.

Combined with mental health status, Chinese college students lost their mental balance, and students have been affected by the pandemic. As a result of the pandemic, Chinese college students present different levels of psychological stress and even develop depression and anxiety. The reasons for this trend are that the environment lives of Chinese college students have changed, and they lack interactions and communication with society and people in significant disasters.

3. REASONS

From the study research, Chinese college students' mental health status faces a significant crisis during the pandemic. The tendencies of anxiety and depression have increased, especially during remission [12]. It shows the pandemic has caused Chinese college students' significant trauma that students cannot find their mental health balance.

The main reasons for this tendency are below. First, unique and significant quarantine policy. During the epidemic, college students stay at home for long periods until the areas are clean. The policy for covid-19 in China. China has a strict policy regarding new coronaviruses. China adheres to a "Dynamic Clearance Policy." If a case occurs, the government requires tracking the entire trajectory. *Regional isolation* is required for both close and non-close contacts in the trajectory. According to the features of the virus, when a case spreads, the government will immediately seal off the city or cordon off the community. The times of blocking are at least two weeks. For example, there were two people has been

gotten covid-19 during the pandemic this year in Shanghai. From China Fund News, these two people's relationship is mother and daughter. They were taking the subway to Pudong community. The government tracked their path and arranged them to a near hospital to isolation in Shanghai. Pudong community were locked down that every people need to get test to detect status of the covid and stayed in their home to quarantine. The people who taken the subway also need to be isolation in the hospital.

The policy shows that the Chinese government is highly concerned about the pandemic. The government is particularly concerned about the effects of the virus on the human body, the changes in virulence, and the speed of transmission. Chinese students' mental health status was lacking in focusing. Other than that, there is a large population in China. It is a big challenge to track the mental health of Chinese college students one by one. On the other side, economic and sanitary conditions development vary from region to region. For example, Beijing and Shanghai are first-tier cities with advanced sanitary which can get relatively fast and quality solutions for people who have physical or mental problems.

The exhaustion of online courses. Since the policy affects people's restricted activities, Chinese college students took online courses to adapt to the pandemic. Moreover, attention is permanently in front of electronic screens during online courses. Therefore, teachers were convenient for managing students when students were distracting, which was easy to discover. Nowadays, people always use electronic devices to do most things, making people convinced. However, the online courses increase to use the time of using electronics. Poor social and physical activity creates unhealthy social habits and environments that shrink social interaction and communication. Long periods of concentration can lead to fatigue.

The progress of knowledge absorption will be slowed down or even stalled because it leads to a lack of understanding [13]. Besides, students during the class have different levels of education reception, for slow reception students who are unfair to absorb fundamental knowledge in limited time. Also, online courses affect communication efficiency and interaction between professors and students who cannot find professors promptly—meeting with their professors by email or online courses that go through their schedule.

An excessive social distance in family Parents followed up more closely on the students' studies. Parenting styles may have a significant and long-term impact on emotional disturbance in future generations [14]. Furthermore, the styles usually fall on a continuum between liberal niches of anchoring and excessive punishment, the extremes of which are defined as passive in any of those directions. [15;16].

Due to the philosophy of education, parents pay special attention to the students' study status. Strict schedules combined with strict demands lead to unprecedented stress and anxiety. Traditional beliefs have influenced parents to seldom make the concentration to the mental health aspects of Chinese college students. Overprotection leads to imposition of many wishes on their children. In addition, SES has been reported to be related to parenting styles. For example, parents with lower income and educational attainment are more likely to discipline their progeny in a punitive manner. This consequence can lead them to neglect the dependency and emotional needs [17].

News explosion. Negative news can grow negative emotions. There is a greater sensitivity to the reception of negative news during the pandemic. The continuous output of outside content leads to anxiety and depression, which is increased by the lack of good relief and rejection methods.

The pandemic urgently influenced global health. People were dealing with a matter of life and death. With ongoing coverage of cases in China, the data increased, making people nervous about a sense of virus crisis. On the other hand, rumors and fake news can result in more severe mental pressure and negative attitudes. In 2022, Shanghai is blocking the whole province because of the pandemic recurrence. The cases are increasing out of control, and rumors are coming out that the data made mistakes from the statistical database. Some people even doubt the QR-code about covid-19 were making mistakes, which is a great deal of skepticism and distrust for public health. Chinese college students touch in with society, which will become more frequent. They not only do not have mature mental health status as adults but also cannot avoid the news in society as young children.

Limited chances for job preparation. College students will face the situation of entering society. Grades are not the only things that they need to consider. Also, they should concentrate on the directions of jobs and the living environment in society. The limited space for activities and social space can hinder their possibility of finding practical activities or internship jobs [11].

Most students chose online working experience because of the pandemic. Chinese college students lack perspective for their jobs that will be unfamiliar with their actual job experience and environment. Students will have a sense of distance between their colleagues and their superiors during a job interview. On the other hand, some jobs need to practice in an actual field, which will be unsatisfactory for students to get experiences.

4. SYMPTOMS

The tendency of anxiety and depression can trigger various diseases and disorders. It includes depression, anxiety, insomnia, a disordered work schedule, and

obesity. For example, during the initial pandemic in Wuhan, the study from “Research on sleep status, body mass index, anxiety, and depression of college students during the post-pandemic era in Wuhan, China,” the data percentage of insomnia, overweight, and obesity, anxiety, and depression are account with 32.73%、19.45%, 15.43% and 62.91% between 1445 valid questionnaires [18].

5. CONCLUSION

For all the above reasons, according to research studies, Chinese university students need to overcome difficulties during the pandemic. However, the factors of stress are complex and multiple, and the negative mental health states of students are increasing. According to the percentage of the data, Chinese university students present different levels of anxiety, depression, and other negative emotions that even lead to the trigger of mental illness. The gradual increase in the percentage of data shows that Chinese college students have a serious sense of crisis and stress in the face of long-term public health emergencies. The response from research paper [2;11] to a pandemic is very immature and inexperienced. Therefore, above analysis of the causes is an important part of the process. The pandemic has had a significant impact on the Chinese environment. The closed social environment and lack of sexual interaction under strict isolation policies affect the normal lives of Chinese university students. The prolonged use of electronic devices causes students to burn out and lose interest and the ability to perceive what is going on around them. In the limited classroom time, different students receive different levels of knowledge, which can be unfair to those who are slower to absorb knowledge. Parents' education of their children also affects their emotions. Strict upbringing and high expectations, as well as overprotective and overwhelming attention, cause anxiety and depression among Chinese college students as stress levels rise. During a pandemic, Chinese college students are not only at risk of infection or even death, but they also do not have the maturity to accept negative news, especially the fear created by rumors and fake news. This can make students' mental health more sensitive and vulnerable. College students also have to face the future stage of entering society. Because they don't have enough practical experience, they won't know much about the chosen field.

Therefore, the approach to healing the psychological state of Chinese university students is unique and urgent. Chinese universities should assess the curriculum of each class to ensure the educational quality of student learning and improve the quality of the classroom. In addition, Chinese universities can establish psychological classes or conduct mental health surveys to increase interaction and communication with students, track their psychological status, and provide counseling and

assistance. Meanwhile, a healthy body is the most essential condition. Chinese college students should do some moderate exercise every day to maintain stable physical fitness. Universities can also provide channels or financial support for students who still want to get practical work experience.

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