



# Practical Research on the Mental Health Education in Colleges and Universities During the Period of Epidemic Prevention and Control

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**Abstract.** Since the spring of this year, the COVID-19 epidemic in China has had a significant impact on the educational management of college students. In order to ensure that the epidemic doesn't enter the campus, colleges and universities have adopted closed-off management or relatively closed-off management policies, disrupting the original life and learning order of students, and as a result, college students' mental health has become an important issue in the educational management of college students. This study uses the questionnaire method and survey method to study the mental health education work during the epidemic prevention and control period, in order to find suitable mental health education methods and paths during this period, so as to better carry out the mental health education work.

**Keywords:** Epidemic prevention and control · Mental health education in colleges and universities · Practical research

## 1 Introduction

Since the start of school this year, the number of areas with COVID-19 epidemic in China has increased, and the number of confirmed cases and asymptomatic carriers has increased rapidly. The epidemic has the characteristics of many outbreak locations, wide prevalence, large-scale outbreaks and sporadic outbreaks, and frequent occurrences in many places. The epidemic is in a state of rapid development and the difficulty of controlling the epidemic is increasing.

College students are the key groups for epidemic prevention and control due to collective accommodation and dense population. In order to ensure the safety of students, many colleges and universities in China implement closed-off management policies, requiring teachers who live off-campus to commute only between school and home and don't go out unless necessary. Students are also restricted from going out, they must ask for leave when they leave school, and the requirements for permitting a leave are strict. In this case, the mental health problems of students become more and more prominent as the period of closed-off management increases. Strengthening the research on students' psychological problems during the period of closed-off management, seeking simple and

effective methods, stabilizing the safety of university campuses, and creating a positive campus atmosphere are very important issues against the background of normalization of epidemic prevention and control.

## **2 Research Object and Method**

The author conducts this survey and research on students in a university, including undergraduates and postgraduates. 9614 valid questionnaires are recovered, including 3642 males, accounting for 37.88%, and 5972 females, accounting for 62.12%. The ratio of male to female students is in line with the gender ratio of the school's students.

The research uses the questionnaire method to conduct surveys with the help of Sojump. At the same time, the research is supplemented by offline interviews, interviewing 62 students to understand the various problems students face in the context of normalization of epidemic prevention and control.

## **3 Survey Results and Analysis**

### **3.1 Worrying About Physical Condition and Getting into a Panic About the Epidemic**

Due to the changes in the characteristics of the COVID-19 epidemic this year, such as multiple-place outbreaks, rapid transmission, and a substantial increase in asymptomatic carriers, coupled with clusters of epidemic in individual schools, students are very worried about the epidemic situation. In addition to closed-off management, nucleic acid testing and daily body temperature reporting have also become daily life tasks that college students are urged to complete. As a result, students are highly concerned about their own and others' physical health, and occasional coughs and mild discomfort may also trigger fears. Some students are also worried that teachers living off-campus will bring the epidemic into the school and cause them to be infected. 10.07% of students feel scared and worry for a long time and lose their sense of security.

### **3.2 Depression**

College students are unable to get out of school for a long period of time and their normal needs can't be met. Not partying and going out less often make it impossible for them to achieve the original way of relaxation. Under the conditions that the express delivery is not available and takeaway is strictly prohibited, the way college students use shopping to ease their moods can't be achieved. In the survey, 70.59% of the students say that being unable to go out is the most stressful thing for them. Under the conditions that they can't relax themselves and the news of the epidemic continues, college students may increase the risk of depressive episodes through stressful emotional reactions, showing black mood, loss of interest in life and study, and no sense of happiness. 5.39% of students reflect that they are emotionally depressed and in a bad mood. Due to the epidemic, the express delivery can't enter the school, some students stop taking medicines because of this, and their depression worsens. 57.93% of the students hope to get psychological assistance in emotion regulation.

### 3.3 Anxiety and Agitation

Due to closed-off management, colleges and universities occasionally conduct online classes. 7.05% of students are very dissatisfied with online courses and think that they are in poor condition. There are also 46.94% of students who think that online classes are okay, but there is still no learning atmosphere. Students reflect that even though all the students in the dormitory are those who study hard, there is still no atmosphere for learning, and the class effect is poor. The resurgence of the epidemic has disrupted students' original life and study plans. For example, some students need to leave school to take an examination, but the examination may be cancelled or delayed due to the epidemic, and students' study plans will be disrupted. Graduates are worried about missing the written examination and interview for recruitment. Students who pass the postgraduate written examination worry about how to participate in the interview. Students are facing various difficulties brought by the epidemic and are eagerly looking forward to the end of the epidemic. Some students frequently check the epidemic information, which leads to more serious anxiety.

### 3.4 Interpersonal Tension

18.25% of the students in the survey feel interpersonal pressure. Due to the inability to go out, students spend more time in the dormitory, the alone time is reduced, the physical distance is shortened, the original safe distance between students is broken, and interpersonal conflicts increase. 1.6% of the students reflect that they often quarrel with their classmates, and their relationship becomes worse, or they are at daggers drawn. 26.28% of the students hope to get psychological support in interpersonal relationships [1].

### 3.5 Economic Pressure

Some college students need to work part-time to earn living expenses due to family economic reasons. Being unable to leave school means that these students can't work and have no source of income, and their daily lives will be difficult.

## 4 Countermeasures

### 4.1 Principles

#### 4.1.1 The Precautionary Principle

The continuation of the epidemic has kept students in a highly sensitive state for a long time. The mental health education work in colleges and universities must take measures to prevent general psychological problems from turning into serious psychological problems and serious psychological problems turning into psychological obstacles, and to prevent students with the disease from getting sicker or self-injury.

#### **4.1.2 The Principle of Reaching Out to All Students**

In the face of the epidemic, students have different degrees of negative emotions, such as anxiety, depression, worry and other negative emotions. Psychological counseling must be carried out for all students to adjust their psychological state [2].

#### **4.1.3 The Principle of Cultivating the Positive Qualities of Students**

Starting from the theory of positive psychology, colleges and universities should not only aim at mental health education in terms of psychological crisis prevention, but also focus on students' own strengths and resources to restore their psychological balance and increase their mental health by tapping into their own resources.

#### **4.1.4 The Pertinence Principle**

According to the four-level prevention and early warning system, the school psychological counseling center, college psychological workstation, classes, and dormitories should pay attention to the key students screened. Schools should focus on key groups, such as students who are quarantined during the epidemic, students whose family members contract the COVID-19, and students who experience major life events (such as being isolated, conflicting with others, losing relationships, etc.). And for such key groups, schools should mobilize teachers, dormitory managing staff, cleaners, security guards and other personnel to report any abnormal behavior of students in time to eliminate possible hidden dangers.

#### **4.1.5 The Principle of Immediate Intervention in Psychological Crisis**

When a student has a psychological crisis, the school should respond quickly and deal with it immediately. It is necessary to strengthen contact with parents of students, report the situation to parents in a timely manner, and do the school's best to assist parents and students to solve specific difficulties during the epidemic. For example, if a student's parents are in the closed and controlled area and can't pick up the student home, the school can send the student to the high-speed rail and negotiate with the conductor to take care of the student on the high-speed rail. The police station where the student's family is located will then pick up the student home, forming a relay to ensure that the student can get home safely [3].

### **4.2 Countermeasures and Methods**

#### **4.2.1 Using Online Work Methods to Increase Psychological Counseling**

In addition to the traditional face-to-face counseling, individual counseling must strengthen online psychological counseling. One of the characteristics of college students is that they are good at using the Internet, and the most frequently used social networking software is Tencent QQ. The opening of QQ online counseling and email counseling is in line with students' social habits. Some students want to receive counseling, but due to various concerns, they are reluctant to go to the psychological counseling

center. QQ counseling effectively solves students' such difficulties. The full-time psychological counseling teachers can take turns on duty online, conduct email counseling at the same time, implement an online and offline double shift system, and open a 24-h psychological assistance hotline to effectively meet the needs of students who want psychological assistance outside working hours [4].

Group psychological counseling is restricted by epidemic prevention and control. Ground groups are only suitable for small groups, with a small number of people and a large space, and they must meet the requirements of non-gathering in the epidemic prevention and control policies. Group psychological counseling mainly focuses on dormitory interpersonal relationships, attitudes towards long-distance relationships, relaxation training, life education, studying for postgraduate entrance examinations, employment and other topics that are highly concerned by students. At present, online group psychological counseling has begun to be carried out in schools. When the offline group counseling can't be carried out, the online group counseling method can effectively relieve the psychological distress of students and can form an online self-help group after the group ends, providing continuous psychological support for group members.

#### **4.2.2 Reasonable Use of Psychological Screening, Emphasis on Psychological Interviews with Students, and Scientific Psychological Crisis Early Warning**

Schools should carry out epidemic psychological screening, using psychological self-assessment questionnaire (SRQ-20) and epidemic psychological health self-assessment questionnaire. Schools can evaluate the psychological crisis risk level of students through SRQ and conduct graded early warning through the evaluation level. Combined with the self-assessment questionnaire on the mental health status of the epidemic, the specific manifestations of the students' psychological problems can be understood and the full-time mental health teachers will conduct psychological interviews with the students with early warnings one by one. The purpose of psychological interview is to conduct psychological assessment on students and to identify students with real psychological problems for later intervention.

In order to ensure the correctness of the psychological assessment results during the psychological interview, the following matters need to be understood about the students: First, it is necessary to know whether students have excessive weight loss through diet, which affects their physical and mental health, and whether students have anxiety and depression through sleep. Second, it is necessary to understand students' interests and hobbies, so as to predict how students will cope when they encounter psychological distress. Third, it is needed to understand the dormitory relationship of students. After students enter university, their interpersonal relationships are more concentrated in dormitory relationships, especially for girls. A bad dormitory relationship means that there are hidden dangers in the mental health of students. Fourth, it is needed to understand the students' participation in school clubs. School club interpersonal relationships are a useful supplement to dormitory interpersonal relationships. Good school club interpersonal relationships are a strong support for students with poor interpersonal relationships in the dormitory. Fifth, it is needed to understand the students' growth history, mainly to understand who are the important others of the students. If others are not their parents, it

is needed to understand the relationship between the students and their parents and the way they get along.

The principles of psychological interviews include: First, it is the principle of combining inquiry and listening. Psychological interview is mainly based on teachers' inquiries, but it is not a simple question and answer, but a combination of full listening to students, so that students are willing to talk about their own information. Second, it is the principle of focusing on closed-end questions. More open-ended questions are used in psychological counseling, while the goal of psychological interviews is to collect information and understand students' study, life, interpersonal relationships, and families in a relatively short period of time. Using closed-ended questions can point directly to the question and maximize the goal of the psychological interview. Third, it is the principle of evaluation at any time. Psychological interviews are generally 30 min long due to their short duration. Teachers should follow up on any clues found in the interview in order to complete the psychological assessment. According to the results of the psychological assessment, the students are divided into three categories: students who need major attention, students who need general attention, and students who do not need attention. Teachers will intervene in the first two categories of students according to different situations.

### **4.2.3 Embodying Humanistic Care and Standardizing Psychological Crisis Intervention**

In recent years, psychological crisis intervention has become the key work of mental health education in colleges and universities. The high incidence of crisis events is caused by a combination of social, family, school and other factors. Over the past 40 years since China's reform and opening up, social changes have been drastic. Families are less stable, and parents are no longer the students' caregivers or even participants. The increase in divorce rates complicates the composition of family members. Students and their parents fail to establish a good parent-child relationship, resulting in parenting trauma. In the primary and secondary schools, the academic competition of students is fierce, the time for eating and sleeping is compressed for study, there is no entertainment and relaxation, and many students have developed severe anxiety and depression in the junior middle school stage. Under such a premise, the epidemic has become the last straw that overwhelms the mental health of college students.

During the epidemic prevention and control period, psychological crisis intervention should follow the following principles: The first is the principle of rapid response. Teachers should respond quickly to abnormal situations of students. Full-time teachers must quickly intervene in the assessment, counselors should contact students' parents as soon as possible, and multiple sectors should interconnect and never delay. The second is the principle of negotiation. Some parents of students in crisis are in the epidemic closed and controlled area and can't get to school. In this case, teachers must consult with the parents, and the parents will entrust the school to take the students to see a doctor and provide 24-h supervision to ensure the safety of the students. The third is the principle of confidentiality. There are many departments and personnel involved in crisis intervention, and the principle of confidentiality should be emphasized for everyone to prevent the leakage of student-related information and avoid negative impacts on students.

#### **4.2.4 Strengthening Publicity and Guidance and Carrying Out Mental Health Education Activities**

The characteristics of young students are that they are lively and active and like to explore new things. Against the background of epidemic prevention and control, the students' nature is suppressed. Schools should carry out corresponding recreational and sports activities in line with the physical and mental characteristics of college students, make full use of students' spare time, spur students' into action, and prevent students from violating school rules and regulations [5].

During the epidemic prevention and control period, mental health education activities should follow the following principles: First, it is the principle of totality. Schools need to require all students to participate in relevant activities. Second, it is the principle of feasibility. The design of activities should be simple and easy to implement, with a high degree of student participation, and the venue of the activity should meet the conditions in the school. Third, it is the principle of acceptability. College students have strong cognitive ability and pursue innovation. The design of activities should be informative and interesting, so that students are willing to participate [6].

##### **4.2.4.1 Student Aerobics**

It is based on the principle of dance therapy. Dance is one of the ways of expressing human emotions, which releases negative energy by opening the body. Schools can choose pop songs that are popular with students and design movements for all students to learn. Secondary-grade schools can organize aerobics activities for all students once a week and each class can flexibly organize students to carry out such activities 3–4 times a week, while the dormitory can carry out such activities every day. Schools can also hold a school-wide aerobics competition to improve the enthusiasm of students to participate.

##### **4.2.4.2 Teachers Can Conduct a Series of Lectures**

They can conduct online lectures on topics such as COVID-19 knowledge, emotional relaxation methods, interpersonal communication, time management, etc. through Zhumu, Tencent Meeting and other software. This measure covers a large number of students and is in line with the school's epidemic prevention and control policy.

##### **4.2.4.3 Reading Aloud**

Reading aloud therapy is a form of expressive art therapy that is not intended to treat disease, but to promote health. Regular participation in reading aloud activities can enhance one's inner richness. Students can read aloud for 15–30 min in the dormitory once a day. They can also take the class as a unit and do group activities once a week, reading aloud, sharing experiences, making self-records, and writing feeling diaries. With the consent of the students, the class summary can be made and shared with the whole class.

##### **4.2.4.4 Strengthening Publicity**

During the epidemic prevention and control period, schools should increase publicity efforts on the appointment phone number of the psychological counseling center, the psychological assistance hotline, and the QQ number for online counseling, and publish

WeChat tweets and Tiktok short videos to ensure that students understand how to seek help.

#### **4.2.5 Multi-level Linkage and the Establishment of a Secondary-Grade School Psychological Workstation**

Due to the frequent replacement of college counselors, it is difficult to rely on counselors to continuously carry out mental health education, and the establishment of secondary-grade school psychological workstations can make up for this deficiency. Psychological workstations should formulate the work content, work principles and other systems suitable for the characteristics of the school, and have its own work operation mechanism. The establishment of these systems enables the work of the workstation to continue even when personnel are transferred.

Psychological workstations should be based on serving the students of the school, help students solve general psychological problems, carry out popular mental health knowledge propaganda for students, organize and lead students to carry out group training development activities, carry out psychological assessment, keep students' mental health files, organize the school's psychological committee member to carry out theme class meetings, lectures, group activities, and conduct psychological crisis intervention. Psychological workstations should also abide by the principle of confidentiality and keep the information of students confidential.

#### **4.2.6 Strengthening the Training of Psychological Committee Members and Carrying Out Peer Psychological Counseling**

After the training of professional knowledge of psychological counseling, the psychological committee members, as students, spend time with their classmates every day, can quickly discover the psychological unhealthy tendency of students, and realize that students may have problems, so as to avoid the occurrence and development of psychological problems. This is not only conducive to the development of students' healthy psychological quality, but also reduces the workload of full-time teachers. After primary and advanced training, psychological committee members can master certain professional skills, such as good listening skills and mental illness assessment capacities. Combined with their own life and learning experiences, psychological committee members of senior class can become peer psychological counselors, carry out peer psychological counseling for students, and effectively solve the psychological distress of students [7].

## **5 Conclusion**

During the epidemic prevention and control period, the mental health education work in colleges and universities is facing new adjustments and the mental health education system must also be supplemented. The impact of the epidemic must be taken into account in all the work of mental health education compulsory courses, publicity, educational activities, and psychological crisis early warning and intervention. In particular, the psychological crisis assessment must focus on considering the impact of the epidemic and



formulate countermeasures in this regard. Due to the repeated outbreak of the epidemic, with the adjustment of the closure and control measures in colleges and universities, the mental health education work should also be revised accordingly to ensure the smooth progress of the work and the healthy development of students' psychology.

**Authors' Contributions.** This paper is independently completed by Lanlan Meng.

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