



Chinese International Students' Mental Health Problems

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Abstract. Nowadays China is experiencing a boom in study abroad, which also attracts the attention of countries notably in western areas. But with the trend for overseas experience comes a psychological burden on international Chinese students, to figure out ways to curb mental problems, this article first covers the primary reasons for studying abroad, such as academic and professional advancement, personal development, and cultural encounters, then identifies the reasons where CIS' mental problems appear. However, there are obstacles to receiving mental health care, such as insufficient resources, cultural insensitivity, financial restraints, and stigma. To address these issues, the article suggests strengthening social support networks, increasing access to multilingual mental health treatments, providing cultural competence training for support personnel, encouraging help-seeking behavior, and providing academic assistance. Implementing these initiatives will provide CIS with the resources it needs to grow academically and personally, encouraging better international relations and a more inclusive student community.

Keywords: Chinese International Students, mental health problem, culture differences, inadequate psychological institutions

1 Introduction

In recent years, the number of Chinese International Students (CIS) has steadily increased, forming a significant part of the global student body. These students serve as a friendship bridge between China and other countries, especially with those where English is spoken as a first language such as the U.S., UK, Canada, Australia, etc. [1]. As China grows into one of the world's main economies, it has become increasingly involved in the wave of globalization, accordingly, attention was drawn to these students in host states [2]. However, while the internationalization of education offers numerous opportunities, it also presents unique challenges, particularly concerning the mental health of CIS. CIS is found suffering from psychological problems like depression and anxiety [3] motivated by academic and professional development, personal growth, and cultural experiences, the severity of the situation has even triggered some CIS' suicides [4]. These difficulties not only impair their academic performance but also jeopardize their entire well-being and social inclusion. Given the significant role that CIS plays in fostering global ties, their mental health deserves urgent attention,

ensuring their mental health is crucial for both maintaining their optimism to engage in their studies and lives and the friendly relations between China and the rest of the world. This article aims to explore these psychological challenges, delve into the reasons behind them, and suggest strategies to better support CIS in overcoming these difficulties.

2 Reasons to Study Abroad

Due to the growing number of CIS, people show great curiosity about the reasons for these children to study abroad, which could be simply divided into two main aspects.

2.1 Academic and Career Development

A determinant factor for students to choose off-ocean study is improving academic knowledge [5]. As education takes priority in the middle-class family, they are attracted by the advanced resources from western countries. Compared with teaching in the country, a foreign university usually has more advantages in improving one's human capital than China, especially in the growing globalization world. Parents hold a belief that overseas education gives them a benefit in the competitive domestic market, especially in the area of business [5]. Students get the chance to be exposed to diverse backgrounds and cultures, learning more professional information, as a result, they broaden their horizons during the classes.

The global ranking is also of great significance when CIS chooses which school to take, while an international university often tends to be higher than that of China's, which represents their academic reputation is more outstanding. The working class, in particular, emphasizes international education as a ladder for social and economic upward mobility, in the hope of status enhancement [6].

2.2 Personal Growth and Cultural Experience

Another motivation is that a study abroad experience is viewed to help develop one's personal experience and exploration of the whole human world. Except for the school courses, there also exists some hidden curriculum like critical thinking and self-care abilities. Linguistics is expected to be fostered while flourishing independence and communication skills because foreign countries provide a social environment often using English [5]. Their language capacity would be well-trained, which is favorable in the current cosmopolitanism updating. Both the academic qualifications and competencies will be useful tools for CIS to gain a high salary in their future career.

The international university offers a platform that tolerates diverse cultures, ensuring CIS exchanges a more global perspective to view the world's transformation. Some CIS stated that their decision to study in the United States was motivated by a desire to break free from the Chinese educational and testing system [5]. To reduce the anxiety brought by National College Commodities, Chinese parents send their children abroad, and they appreciate Western critical-thinking courses instead of only concentrating on testing in China. Thanks to the open culture, CIS has the opportunity to express themselves on

the global stage, shape their personality, and participate in global cultural and economic exchanges through traveling.

3 Causes of Psychological Problems for International Students

Despite the overseas learning experiences having several strengths, however, nowadays CIS are facing huge stress while attending foreign schools, which is a potential pitfall damaging their schoolwork and daily lives [6]. Consequently, more and more attention is paid to researching the causes of CIS's psychological problems.

3.1 Cultural Transition and Adaptation

To begin with, it is tough for CIS to quickly adapt to a comprehensively different environment because of the habits and culture. The cultural distance prevents CIS from launching activities from native students, which reflects their similar characteristics. Since a huge amount of CIS chooses European countries for further study, they get puzzled by cultures like rules and customs in the Western background that have little in common with China [7]. But usually, educational institutions lack measures to get CIS through this period while cultural inclusive-ness is inadequate, affecting their social connections and psychological well-being [8]. Take differences in individualism and collectivism as an example, most CIS prefer to work out a solution on their own when in trouble, which may be misinterpreted as apathy or lack of interest on the part of students [1]. Besides, Brunsting et al. highlight that individuals are forced to learn new abilities to navigate the tensions not only in culture but also in the stage of a new educational system based on values and assumptions they have never met before [7]. The process of acculturation, which involves adapting to a new cultural environment, can be particularly challenging and may lead to feelings of loneliness and homesickness [2].

3.2 Social Support and Isolation

In addition, Brunsting et al. found that social isolation makes CIS feel isolated from time to time [7]. The study revealed that students who reported higher levels of social support were less likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety. However, most CIS struggle to build meaningful connections in their host countries, particularly when cultural differences and language barriers hinder their ability to form relationships. International students tend to "experience challenges with belonging and loneliness more frequently and acutely than domestic students" [7]. For CIS who might lack friends sharing the same hobbies, they are afraid of communicating with classmates, worrying about if the atmosphere would become embarrassing after they cut into a strange group discussion. Even if they muster up the courage to join the conversation, foreigners are likely to ignore them sometimes on account of unfamiliarity. Under these

circumstances, CIS become more and more depressed, gradually stopping opening up and silently pining for home instead of trying new socializations.

CIS could not bear the strong feeling of sadness and hope to be comforted by someone else. But the fact is CIS often have difficulty obtaining social support from other students and faculty, a sense of connection or belonging to their institution [7].

3.3 Academic Pressures

Moreover, CIS might be stressful when completing academic work. Chinese traditional culture places a high value on academic performance, more than ever, CIS are being told by their families and society that their most essential task in life is to study hard and attain academic success. An academic failure may result in a lifelong sense of failure for Chinese pupils, which exacerbates their mental health challenges [3].

When CIS came to an unfamiliar region, the sudden shift in the model of teaching caught them off guard. It is quite difficult to fully understand a brand-new system of exams and assignments in a short period of time—the Chinese education system is often more rigid and exam-focused, while international universities tend to encourage independent learning, critical thinking, and extensive reading outside of class. CIS struggles to be accustomed to balancing multiple assignments and readings in a foreign language.

Afterward, CIS often hesitate to seek clarification from professors or peers due to cultural factors, such as the fear of appearing incompetent or impolite, creating a vicious circle: CIS do not fully understand the content of the class, and the efficiency of their assignments will be greatly declined, in turn results in low grades, increasing their anxiety and stress. In contrast to China, an international university requires students to read lots of resources before or after class, the academic demands coupled with the pressure to meet high expectations, leave CIS with limited time to relax or engage in social activities, further contributing to their sense of stress and isolation [1].

3.4 Language Barriers and Discrimination

Last but not least, language barriers and potential discrimination contribute to depression in CIS. They are unable to speak the local language as fluently as local students, which is a barrier for them to encounter discussions and academic exchanges. The language gap not only directly affects their academic performance, but might also lead to feelings of shame or loss of face, undermining their confidence [1]. According to Lian, many CIS acknowledged that language challenges have a negative impact on both their academic and social lives [9]. The sense of inferiority might damage their self-esteem as CIS have the possibility to perceive themselves as less capable or intelligent compared to their local peers.

Furthermore, CIS may experience discrimination based on their cultural background and limited English proficiency, particularly in Western countries [10]. They may face prejudice and stereotypes that can harm their self-esteem and mental health. For instance, students who feel that their language skills are inadequate may avoid social interactions, further isolating themselves and worsening their mental health. In some

cases, CIS may even blame themselves for not fitting in or failing to meet the expectations of others [11]. The experience of being treated as “knowing nothing” has become normalized for some CIS. Discrimination in various forms, including academic and social perspectives could lead to feelings of alienation and exclusion, exacerbating psychological problems.

4 Challenges to Take Effective Measures

Since mental health problems have already affected CIS' lives in diverse aspects, the public is eager to search for effective methods to deal with the urgent issues. However, implementing comprehensive measures face many difficulties.

4.1 Access to Mental Health Resources

Initially, CIS may face difficulties in accessing mental health resources due to various factors. The number of mental interventions is inadequate—many universities lack the resources and infrastructure needed to provide comprehensive mental health support to their international student populations, which could lead to long wait times for students to counsel services [9].

When it comes to CIS who require a special cultural professional, it getting more problematical. Their temporary stay prevents a long-term support network and continuity of care from being established, the duration of their studies is short, and they may not have the time or opportunity to establish consistent, ongoing relationships with mental health professionals.

Language barriers can also make it more difficult for CIS to understand and navigate the rare systems that are more geared toward locals in the host country [12]. Many CIS are unable to communicate their needs effectively, resulting in misunderstandings and a lack of trust in the system. Additionally, unfamiliarity with the system can be a barrier to accessing services as students may not know where to turn or what resources are even available to them [13]. These factors together highlight the urgent need to make CIS more accessible to mental health resources.

4.2 Cultural Sensitivity of Support Services

Simultaneously, there is limited awareness among CIS about available mental health institutions. Taking the specific challenges that CIS faces into account, support services must be culturally sensitive to satisfy their specific needs. Unfortunately, most of them lack this cultural competence. Without an understanding of the cultural context and experiences of CIS, misunderstandings, and miscommunications are likely to arise, thus cutting the effort of the support. As a result, CIS usually prefer to rely on family or friends rather than seek professional help, especially in a new environment [14].

More importantly, cultural differences in help-seeking can also be a challenge. Some CIS may be too concerned with what others view about seeking mental resources. What they worry about is stigma and discrimination, causing them to evade the problem.

Hence, CIS may suppress their emotions, avoid seeking help, or continue to suffer in silence, exacerbating their psychological distress.

4.3 Stigma and Fear of Disclosure

Eventually, the deep-rooted stigma and fear of disclosure are elements that hinder CIS from seeking help for mental health issues [4]. They try to maintain an image that everything goes well in front of others and fear judgment and discrimination from their peers, family, and even professionals. It is proved that CIS persists in emotional self-control because they believe that bothering others for mental health is a symbol of weakness [3]. This could lead to a reluctance to disclose their problems, preventing them from accessing the support they need. Moreover, CIS tend to be more reactive and reluctant to seek professional help, which is related to their cultural backgrounds [1]. In Chinese culture, there is a widespread perception that personal troubles should be addressed quietly and that seeking outside assistance, particularly from mental health specialists, may reflect negatively on their capacity to deal with them. The fear of being viewed as weak or incapable can set off a vicious cycle in which the individual's mental health deteriorates even further due to a lack of care, delaying or even obstructing healing.

5 Solutions to Reduce Psychological Pressure

Addressing the psychological problems faced by CIS requires comprehensive solutions. These solutions should focus on enhancing social support networks, improving access to mental health resources, training support staff in cultural competence, promoting help-seeking behavior, and providing academic and logistical support.

5.1 Enhancing Social Support Networks

The beginning to step towards is the most difficult, once teachers help build the relationship between two students, they have the possibility to hang out together and get closer. The establishment of host national connectedness is crucial to the adjustment in this procedure of CIS, mitigating the impact of factors such as language proficiency, cultural distance, and cultural inclusiveness in the classroom on their life satisfaction and psychological symptoms [8]. Since CIS relies more on its Chinese functions, actively adapting to Western teaching and learning styles is a hardship without extra support [1]. What schools could give is, for instance, academic and cultural transition programs specifically for freshmen [7]. Universities can facilitate this by organizing cultural exchange programs, mentorship initiatives, and social events that bring together international and domestic students. These activities can help reduce feelings of isolation and foster a sense of belonging.

5.2 Improving Access to Mental Health Resources

Regarding universities, they should promote multilingual mental health services in order to address the unique requirements of CIS. With the tailored language assistance, CIS is allowed to talk more frankly and effectively about their currently undergoing difficulties. Providing translated materials about mental health services could also be helpful in improving accessibility and knowledge among CIS, letting them better grasp the various assistance alternatives.

In addition, online mental health resources and counseling services could boost flexibility and convenience with time and location problems. CIS could benefit from it because they could get support whenever and wherever they want, which is significant considering the time zone variations and occupied schedules that they might have. By employing online platforms, schools can ensure that students receive timely and relevant assistance, even when in-person resources are restricted.

Apart from the institution itself extension, support staff dealing with international students should receive training in cultural competence. Ma et al emphasizes the importance of providing mental health support that thinks about the cultural backgrounds and specific needs of CIS [11]. Staff training should focus on understanding CIS's specific needs and experiences, allowing them to respond more effectively and culturally sensitively. Incorporating bilingual staff could be included in services to raise popularity in CIS [15]. Advice should be drawn from students, which ensures that the provided support is relevant to culture and effective, encouraging greater engagement from CIS.

Awareness campaigns can also educate the university community about the mental health needs of international students, which eliminates stigma to an extent and encourages CIS to seek help.

5.3 Promoting Help-Seeking Behavior

Following, efforts to reduce stigma and promote help-seeking behavior among CIS are crucial as well as changes in institutions. Targeted campaigns are supposed to be conducted to educate students about the importance of seeking help for mental health issues, which should emphasize the availability of support strategies to enhance the trust of CIS, such as workshops, seminars, and peer support programs. By fostering a more open and accepting environment, CIS has the opportunity to acknowledge the range of services accessible to them, making it easier for them to seek help when needed and reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues [15]. Studies have shown that students who participated in mental health awareness programs were more likely to report positive attitudes toward seeking help and were less likely to experience symptoms of psychological distress.

5.4 Academic Support

Meanwhile, extra academic support can help CIS manage academic pressures, thus improving their academic performance. Given the significant cultural differences between

CIS and local students, schools have the responsibility to ask teachers to focus more on CIS to make them adapt to the new education system. For example, academic support services, such as tutoring and study skills courses, should be offered to minimize CIS' stress [14]. Targeted language training for CIS also matters a lot, while at the same time, professors should adopt a more inclusive teaching approach to assist them in better integration into campus life [1]. Creating a diversified academic environment that caters to student needs from all backgrounds is key to overcoming CIS's academic pressures.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the CIS's mental health problems remain to be solved right now, after analyzing the leading factors from cultural, social, academic, and language angles, several suggestions are drawn in response to these various causes, though there lie in some unavoidable challenges like opportunities and cultural differences of mental health institutions, and fear issues. Enhancing social support, providing more psychological services, and specializing the staff are all crucial steps in addressing the psychological problems faced by CIS. By implementing these solutions, CIS's support and resources they need to succeed academically and personally could be ensured and the psychological problems could be well solved. More friendly relations between China and other countries therefore are likely to become closer in the future, fostering a more inclusive and supportive international student community.

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