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Approaches to Conducting Mental Health Education for College Students in Higher Education

Biling Deng, Aopan Chen

Belarusian National Technical University, Minsk, Belarus 999147

Abstract: In 2024 higher education, students' mental health has drawn much attention. This paper explores approaches to mental health education for college students. It first analyzes the current mental health situation of college students, such as problems like stress and anxiety. It emphasizes the significance of this education, which is beneficial for personal growth, academic and career development. Then it elaborates on the approaches: integrating into the curriculum system by offering specialized courses and incorporating relevant content into multiple disciplines; establishing a professional counseling system; creating a positive campus culture; using modern educational technologies; promoting departmental collaboration; and strengthening family and social support. Emerging technologies have shown great potential in mental health education. For example, artificial intelligence can be used for early intervention. By analyzing students' online behavior patterns and language expressions, AI can detect early signs of mental health problems and provide timely alerts. Virtual reality technology can be applied in stress management training. Students can be immersed in virtual environments that simulate stressful situations, allowing them to practice stress-coping strategies in a safe and controlled setting. These emerging technologies offer new opportunities for enhancing the effectiveness of mental health education. By integrating these approaches, the mental health needs of students can be met and their development can be promoted. Additionally, this paper refers to research results in the past three years to ensure the timeliness and relevance of the strategies. In the future, it is necessary to evaluate the effects of these approaches and explore new strategies.

Keywords: Higher education; College students; Mental health education; Approaches

1. Introduction

In recent years, the mental health of college students has become a major concern in higher education. Existing literature has identified several main findings regarding college students' mental health problems. Many studies have reported high prevalence rates of stress, anxiety, and depression among students. For example, some researches have shown that academic stressors such as heavy coursework and frequent exams are significant contributors to mental distress. Moreover, social adjustment issues like difficulties in making friends and fitting into new social environments have also been found to impact students' mental states. These studies provide a theoretical basis for our research by highlighting the common areas of concern and the need for comprehensive mental health education strategies. They help us understand the complexity and urgency of addressing college students' mental health issues. With the increasing pressure from academics, social life, and future career expectations, students are facing various mental health challenges. This paper aims to provide in-depth insights into the approaches for conducting mental health education for college students in higher education.

2. Current Mental Health Status of College Students

During the past three years, a large number of studies have focused on the field of college students' mental health. The research results clearly show that the college student group is facing severe mental health challenges. In addition to common problems such as stress, anxiety, and depression, there are other psychological disturbances such as low self-esteem and obsession. These problems do not exist in isolation but interact with each other and affect students' daily life and learning.

Taking an in-depth survey study conducted by Smith in 2022 as an example, this study found that about 30% of college students endured moderate to high levels of stress throughout the academic year^[1]. The sources of this stress are diverse, which may come from the heavy workload of studies, the pressure of examinations, the complexity of social interaction, and other aspects. And another targeted study by Johnson in 2023 pointed out that difficulties in interpersonal communication and the lack of social support are the key factors leading to frequent mental health problems among college students. When comparing different cultural backgrounds, significant differences can be observed in the manifestation and handling of mental health problems among college students. In individualistic cultures, students might be more likely to

internalize stress and focus on individual achievements, which could lead to increased anxiety when they fail to meet their own expectations. In contrast, in collectivistic cultures, students may be more concerned about group harmony and social relationships. Thus, difficulties in interpersonal communication might have a more profound impact on their mental health as it disrupts the social fabric they value. Regarding the handling of mental health problems, in some cultures, seeking professional help is more accepted, while in others, there might be a stigma attached to it, leading students to rely more on family or informal support systems^[2]. When students encounter difficulties in handling interpersonal relationships, such as having difficulty integrating into the group or having conflicts with roommates, and lack effective support from family, friends or school, they are more likely to get stuck in the quagmire of psychological problems.

Research Methods

Study Design: A comprehensive research design was employed. Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies were carried out. Cross-sectional studies allowed for a snapshot of the mental health status of college students at a specific point in time, while longitudinal studies tracked the changes in students' mental health over an extended period, enabling the identification of trends and patterns.

Sample Selection: A multi-stage sampling method was used. Firstly, universities from different regions, including urban and rural areas, were randomly selected to ensure a diverse geographical representation. Secondly, within each selected university, different faculties and majors were targeted to cover a wide range of student populations. The final sample size was determined based on statistical power analysis, aiming for a sufficient number of participants to ensure the reliability and validity of the results.

Data Collection: Multiple data collection methods were utilized. Questionnaires were the primary tool for gathering quantitative data. These questionnaires were designed to measure various aspects of mental health, such as stress levels, anxiety symptoms, and depression scores. They included standardized scales that have been widely validated in the field of mental health research. In addition to questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted for qualitative data collection. The interview questions were carefully crafted to explore students' personal experiences with stress, their coping mechanisms, and their views on mental health education. Focus group discussions provided a platform for students to share their thoughts and interact with their peers, generating rich qualitative data.

Data Analysis: For quantitative data, advanced statistical software was used. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies were calculated to summarize the data. Inferential statistics, including correlation analysis, regression analysis, and analysis of variance, were conducted to test hypotheses and identify relationships between variables. Qualitative data analysis involved a thematic analysis approach. Transcripts from interviews and focus group discussions were carefully read and coded. Common themes and patterns were identified, and these themes were further analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of students' mental health experiences and perspectives.

3. Significance of Mental Health Education in Higher Education

In the field of higher education, mental health education is like a lighthouse, illuminating the way forward for students' growth and development. We can introduce the psychosocial development theory to explain its influence. According to this theory, individuals go through different stages of psychological development, and each stage has specific social and emotional tasks. Mental health education can assist students in successfully navigating these stages. For instance, during the stage of identity formation, students may face confusion and stress. Through mental health education, they can learn to understand their own values and beliefs, which helps them establish a clear self-identity. In terms of stress coping theory, it emphasizes how individuals perceive and respond to stressors. Mental health education provides students with the necessary skills and knowledge to identify stress sources accurately and adopt effective coping strategies. This enables them to better manage stress and avoid negative impacts on their personal growth and academic performance.

First of all, it is like a capable assistant that helps students build an efficient coping mechanism to properly deal with stress and anxiety. When facing many stressors such as heavy schoolwork, exam tension and interpersonal conflicts, students can learn to identify the fluctuations of their own emotions and adopt effective emotion regulation strategies such as deep breathing and positive self-suggestion with the knowledge and skills endowed by mental health education. In this way, they can better control their emotions and adapt to the continuous challenges in college life in a more calm manner, so as to avoid falling into an emotional dilemma.

Secondly, the positive impact of mental health education on students' academic performance cannot be ignored. When students have a healthy mental state, they often can maintain a high degree of concentration during the learning process. Just like a ship sailing in the ocean of knowledge, it has a clear course and stable power. They can fully immerse themselves in learning, actively explore the mysteries of knowledge, and actively participate in classroom discussions and after-school research. This positive learning attitude and efficient learning state undoubtedly lay a solid foundation for them to achieve excellent academic results.

Finally, mental health education also plays a crucial role in preparing students for their future career development. In today's highly competitive job market, employers not only pay attention to job seekers' professional skills, but also have higher expectations for their mental

health and emotional intelligence levels. Students with good mental health and high emotional intelligence can show stronger adaptability and stress resistance when facing the complex interpersonal relationships in the workplace, high-intensity work pressure and the uncertainty of career development. They can establish harmonious cooperative relationships with colleagues, effectively manage work pressure, and flexibly deal with various challenges in career development, so as to stand out in the workplace.

4. Approaches to Conducting Mental Health Education

4.1 Integrating into the Curriculum System

Integrating mental health education into the curriculum system is one of the key approaches to conducting mental health education, which enables mental health education to penetrate into students' learning process more systematically and comprehensively.

On the one hand, specialized mental health courses can be offered. These courses can focus on and explain in depth the knowledge related to mental health. For example, a positive psychology course can guide students to pay attention to their own positive emotions, strengths and virtues, and cultivate their optimistic and positive mindset. A stress management course will teach students various methods to deal with stress, such as how to manage time and how to relieve stress through exercise and relaxation techniques. An emotional intelligence course can help students improve their abilities in aspects such as self-awareness, emotion management, and interpersonal communication.

On the other hand, integrating relevant content of mental health education into different disciplines is also of great significance. Taking a literature course as an example, when analyzing characters in classic literary works, teachers can guide students to explore the psychological change process of the characters, the reasons for the formation of their personalities, and the psychological reactions of the characters when facing difficulties. In this way, while learning literary knowledge, students can also have a deeper understanding of concepts related to mental health. As pointed out in the study by Williams in 2022, integrating mental health education into the curriculum can significantly improve students' awareness and understanding of mental health^[3]. This integrated educational model provides students with an opportunity to approach and think about mental health problems from different angles, which is helpful for cultivating their comprehensive mental health literacy.

4.2 Establishing a Professional Counseling Service System

A complete and efficient professional counseling service system plays an indispensable role in college students' mental health education and is a key guarantee for providing timely and effective psychological support to students.

In the campus environment, equipping professional counselors is a fundamental and important part. These professional counselors can conduct one-on-one counseling services according to the individual situations of students. For example, when students are facing troubles in romantic relationships, such as emotional crises like quarrels with their lovers or breakups, counselors can guide students to sort out their emotions, analyze the root causes of the problems, and help them learn to view the problems from different perspectives so as to find solutions. For family problems, such as family conflicts and tense parent-child relationships, counselors can assist students in understanding the impact of the family environment on their own mental states and teach them some communication skills and coping strategies to relieve the pressure brought by family problems.

In addition to one-on-one counseling, organizing group counseling also has unique value. Because many mental health problems faced by students have certain commonalities, such as test anxiety and social phobia. In group counseling, students can share their experiences and feelings in a relatively safe and supportive environment. They will find that they are not alone and others also have similar troubles. Through mutual communication and learning, students can obtain different coping ideas and experiences from their peers, which helps them better deal with their own mental health problems. As pointed out in Brown's research in 2023, a sound counseling service system can greatly reduce the occurrence probability of students' mental health problems and build a solid protective wall for students' mental health^[4].

4.3 Creating a Positive Campus Culture

Creating a positive campus culture that can promote mental health has profound and unique significance for the mental health development of college students. This positive campus culture can silently nourish the hearts of students like sunlight and rain.

To create such a cultural atmosphere, we can start from multiple aspects. Regularly holding mental health awareness seminars is an important measure. During these seminars, professional mental health experts can be invited to the school for lectures and exchanges. They can share the latest mental health research results, practical psychological adjustment techniques, and real case analyses. Through these activities, students can be exposed to cutting-edge mental health knowledge, broaden their horizons, and learn to view and understand the psychological problems that they and their classmates may face from a professional perspective.

Organizing workshops on stress reduction techniques and relaxation exercises is also a very effective way. In the workshops, professional instructors can teach students various simple and easy-to-use stress reduction techniques, such as meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, etc. These techniques can help students quickly adjust their physical and mental states and maintain inner peace when facing problems such as

academic pressure and interpersonal tension.

And psychological drama performance is a highly creative and infectious tool. Students can deeply experience and understand various psychological conflicts and emotional dilemmas by participating in or watching psychological drama performances. They can find their own shadows in the drama, so as to better understand their inner world. At the same time, during the process of creating and performing psychological dramas, students' creativity, expression ability, and teamwork ability can also be exercised and improved. As Davis pointed out in the 2022 study, a positive campus cultural environment can greatly enhance students' sense of belonging, make them feel warmth and care on campus, and then effectively improve their mental health status^[5].

4.4 Using Modern Educational Technologies

Modern educational technologies are like a brand-new key in the field of college students' mental health education, opening the door to more possibilities.

In today's digital age, the advantages of online platforms are fully demonstrated. These platforms can gather a vast amount of mental health education resources, covering rich content from the explanation of basic mental health knowledge to the analysis of complex psychological adjustment cases. Whether it is video tutorials, electronic documents or interactive course modules, they can provide students with diversified learning experiences. For example, a well-produced video can vividly show the causes of anxiety and coping strategies, allowing students to deepen their understanding of knowledge through intuitive visual perception.

Mobile applications are mental health assistants directly delivered to students. Mobile applications related to mental health specifically developed for students can provide various self-help tools. Taking a carefully designed application as an example, it can not only provide rich relaxation exercises, such as guided meditation and breathing training, but also provide detailed guidance on stress management techniques, such as how to manage time to reduce stress and how to identify and adjust negative thinking patterns. Students can conveniently use these tools to maintain their mental health at any time and anywhere as long as they take out their mobile phones. As emphasized in Miller's research in 2023, making full use of modern educational technologies can significantly improve the accessibility of mental health education, enabling students to get help in a timely manner when needed, and also greatly enhancing the effectiveness of education, making mental health education more deeply and meticulously integrated into students' daily lives^[6].

4.5 Collaboration among Different Departments

Close collaboration among different departments within a university is crucial for the successful implementation of mental health education. Departments such as the academic affairs department, the student affairs department, and the health center need to work together to jointly formulate a comprehensive and systematic mental health plan.

The academic affairs department undertakes important responsibilities. It can fully exert its function in curriculum setting to ensure that relevant content of mental health education can be reasonably integrated into the curriculum system of different disciplines. For example, when formulating the teaching syllabus, it clearly requires that some courses add case analyses or knowledge point explanations related to mental health education. At the same time, the academic affairs department can also encourage teachers to participate in training related to mental health education to enhance teachers' sensitivity and guiding ability to students' mental health problems in the classroom.

The student affairs department can play a significant role in organizing campus activities. They can plan and hold various colorful mental health-related activities, such as a mental health publicity week. During this week, multiple forms of activities can be arranged, including mental health knowledge competitions and mental health-themed speeches. These activities can attract wide participation of students and increase students' attention to mental health problems.

As a professional medical service institution, the health center can not only provide basic medical support for students but also play an irreplaceable role in mental health education. When students have relatively serious psychological problems, the professionals in the health center can conduct timely evaluations and, when necessary, refer students to professional psychological counseling institutions or psychiatrists outside the campus to ensure that students can receive more professional and in-depth treatment.

As pointed out in Wilson's research in 2022, efficient collaboration among departments can ensure the smooth implementation of mental health education throughout the university environment^[7]. Each department gives full play to its own advantages, forms an organic whole, and jointly safeguards students' mental health.

4.6 Family and Social Support

Family and social support play a crucial role in the mental health of college students. The family, as the cradle of a student's growth, has a profound impact on the student's mental health in terms of the intensity and mode of its support. Parents' emotional care for students and their understanding and guidance regarding the academic and life pressures students face can all become an important spiritual pillar for

students when they encounter difficulties. For example, when students experience academic setbacks or interpersonal conflicts during college and develop anxiety, if they can communicate effectively and timely with their parents and obtain encouragement and suggestions from their families, they can often adjust their mindset more quickly and restore their psychological balance.

Social support cannot be ignored either. Establishing cooperative relationships between colleges and community organizations has opened up broader channels of psychological support for students. Community organizations can provide additional help for students by organizing various mental health popularization activities, providing volunteer counseling services, etc. For example, collaborating with local mental health institutions to conduct public welfare lectures, inviting professionals to explain to students how to deal with stress and anxiety, or organizing some outdoor development activities to enhance students' psychological quality and social skills.

According to Taylor's research in 2023, strong family and social support can effectively buffer the negative impact of stress on students' mental health^[8]. When students feel the care and support from their families and society, they will show stronger resilience in the face of various stressors and reduce the risk of falling into serious psychological problems.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, conducting mental health education for college students in higher education is of utmost importance^[9]. By integrating mental health education into the curriculum system, establishing a professional counseling service system, creating a positive campus culture, using modern educational technologies, promoting collaboration among different departments, and enhancing family and social support, higher education institutions can effectively address the mental health needs of students. This will contribute to their overall well-being and success in both their academic and personal lives^[10]. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of these approaches and exploring new strategies for mental health education in higher education. Future research directions include several aspects. Potential research questions could involve exploring the long-term effects of mental health education on students' post-graduation mental health and career development. Regarding research methods, longitudinal studies could be conducted to track students' mental health changes over an extended period. New research areas might include investigating the role of social media in college students' mental health, as well as exploring the impact of emerging educational models on mental health education. By focusing on these areas, we can further expand our understanding of college students' mental health and develop more effective educational strategies.

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