

The Dilemma and Approaches to College Students' Mental Health Education from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

Zhang Yi and Yasmin Hussain

Abstract – With the intensification of social competition and the impact of diverse cultural values, the mental health issues of college students have become a matter of great concern to the nation, society, and the public. Enhancing psychological quality and improving coping abilities are now central tasks for mental health education in contemporary colleges and universities. Positive psychology advocates stimulating individual experiences to shape positive personality traits and enhance subjective well-being, offering new perspectives for college students' mental health education. Based on positive psychology, this paper analyzes the main problems in current college mental health education, discusses its significant value, and proposes four approaches: shifting educational concepts and redefining educational objectives; innovating educational content and optimizing the curriculum; enriching educational forms and building educational platforms; and emphasizing humanistic care to foster a positive educational environment.

Keywords – Positive Psychology, College Students, Mental Health Education, Approaches

I. INTRODUCTION

Currently, non-mainstream ideologies and diverse cultural values collide, academic and employment pressures coexist, and changes in students' internal and external environments have resulted in suboptimal psychological states and a frequent occurrence of mental health problems among college students. In April 2023, the Ministry of Education and sixteen other departments jointly issued the *Special Action Plan for Strengthening and Improving Students' Mental Health Work in the New Era (2023-2025)*, which proposed a national strategy to build an, all-encompassing, multi-subject, multi-dimensional mental health work system in the coming years. College students' health education has become a major real-world issue that concerns the nation, society, and the public. How to effectively carry out mental health education, enhance students' ability to cope with psychological impacts, and cultivate physically and mentally healthy contemporary college students is a pressing issue that needs to be addressed.

Zhang Yi, City University Malaysia (Email address: 582622937@qq.com)
Yasmin Hussain, City University Malaysia (Email address: dryasmin.hussain@city.edu.my).

II. OVERVIEW OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Entering the 21st century, the focus of psychological research has gradually shifted from studying human deficiencies and weaknesses to analysing strengths and positive elements, creating favourable conditions for the development of positive psychology. In January 2000, American scholar Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi published "Positive Psychology: An Introduction," marking the official birth of this emerging discipline and initiating a revolution in psychology.

Positive psychology, using scientific research methods, mainly studies how positive personal experiences, traits, values, interpersonal, and social relationships lead to happiness and well-being. In terms of methodology, positive psychology primarily adopts empirical approaches such as scales, questionnaires, interviews, and role-playing, supplemented by non-empirical and phenomenological methods, advocating a positive orientation in psychology.

Some positive psychological qualities, such as optimism, confidence, courage, resilience, and hope, play a significant role in alleviating or even resisting psychological problems and disorders. Positive psychology guides people to focus on enhancing happiness and thus promotes mental health, correcting some shortcomings of traditional psychology. By shifting from the traditional focus on human pessimism to the study of human strengths and value, and by emphasizing both individual and social psychology, positive psychology has high credibility. Applying its theories to college students' mental health education has significant practical value.

III. DILEMMAS IN MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION UNDER THE LENS OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Misconceptions in Understanding Mental Health Education

Traditional psychology, after a long period of development, has achieved outstanding results in diagnosing and preventing psychological problems and has had a profound impact on mental health education. It holds that the focus should be on diagnosing, treating, and preventing psychological problems, emphasizing negative states and pathology, and regarding humans as flawed and vulnerable, requiring correction and therapy.

Influenced by traditional psychology, many colleges have not paid attention to applying positive psychology's principles in educational and organizational contexts, such as fostering positive traits or improving satisfaction and well-being. Mental health education is often problem-oriented, lacking a focus on cultivating strengths and positive experiences. Some even mistakenly believe that positive psychology is a complete negation of traditional psychology. These misconceptions reflect differences in

values and goals, as well as cognitive limitations, when applying positive psychology to college mental health education. In practice, colleges must take a dialectical view of both traditional and positive psychology, fully recognizing their focuses, methods, and application fields for better educational outcomes.

The Form and Content of Mental Health Education Require Optimization

More and more colleges are implementing reforms in mental health education based on positive psychology. However, problems remain in curriculum content, teaching methods, educational pathways, and continuous improvement of teaching quality.

In terms of content, current positive psychology education often only addresses surface-level emotions like happiness, while lacking in fostering deeper positive qualities such as courage, resilience, and creativity. Such one-sided content cannot fully meet students' needs or truly enhance their positive psychological states. In terms of teaching methods, many colleges still adopt the lecture format typical of traditional psychology, lacking interaction and practical experience, making students passive receivers rather than active participants. Moreover, due to individual differences, rigid approaches may not suit all students. In terms of pathways, positive psychology education should be carried out through various channels like classroom teaching, counselling, and group activities, but many schools lack diversity in implementation and effective assessment mechanisms, making it hard to quantify or improve results.

The Atmosphere and Ecosystem for Self-Education Need to Be Cultivated

Positive psychology affirms individuals' potential in recognizing and resolving psychological issues, with self-education as a crucial driving force. However, current college mental health education faces the following problems in self-education:

Lack of self-awareness: Positive psychology stresses recognizing one's strengths, values, and potential, but many students lack a deep understanding of their inner world, resulting in unclear goals and poor self-education planning.

Insufficient motivation: Self-education requires strong intrinsic motivation and discipline. Many students lack sustained motivation due to unclear goals or weak willpower.

Difficulty in emotional regulation: Positive psychology emphasizes the importance of emotion in growth. Without effective emotional regulation, negative emotions like frustration and anxiety can hinder self-education.

IV. APPROACHES TO COLLEGE MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION GUIDED BY POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Transform Educational Concepts and Redefine Objectives

Traditional psychological education focuses on preventing disorders and treating illnesses, mainly emphasizing theoretical knowledge over behavioral training.

Positive psychology, on the other hand, while also addressing possible problems, emphasizes potential development, emotional and personality cultivation, and organizational shaping to solve mental health issues.

Colleges should shift from problem-solving to cultivating positive qualities like optimism, courage, resilience, and gratitude, helping students build psychological resilience, improve self-awareness, and prevent disorders. Mental health should be seen as part of comprehensive development, closely integrated with academics, career, and social life, forming an integrated educational approach.

Innovate Educational Content and Optimize the Curriculum

Both theoretical and practical teaching are vital. From the positive psychology perspective, colleges should innovate across curriculum objectives, content, teaching methods, quality assessment, and ongoing improvement, moving beyond problem-based approaches to a system centered on positive personality development.

According to positive psychology, preventing psychological problems is more meaningful than merely resolving them. Enhancing students' qualities and personalities serves both preventive and curative functions. The aim should be to foster psychological resilience, positive personality, and self-efficacy, moving away from purely problem-oriented standards.

Teaching methods should blend theory with practice, integrating classroom instruction, extracurricular activities, and social engagement. Group sharing, experiential learning, and value affirmation should allow students to experience personal growth and self-affirmation.

Curriculum should combine knowledge, practical skills, and positive psychology principles, enabling students to evaluate themselves, regulate their emotions, and cultivate self-efficacy. Assessment should be both qualitative and quantitative, involving teachers, students, and society, with feedback driving continuous improvement.

Enrich Educational Forms and Build Educational Platforms

Positive psychology views family, society, and school as an organizational system for implementation. The increasingly complex social environment, cultural diversity, and internal educational pressures have all contributed to rising mental health problems among college students. Therefore, colleges must form a collaborative "family-school-society" model for mental health education, emphasizing family's active role, society's service function, and the school's preventive function, all focused on shaping students' positive psychological traits.

Emphasize Humanistic Care and Foster a Positive Educational Ecosystem

Mental health education is shaped by both internal and external environments. Fostering humanistic care and a positive ecosystem enhances educational outcomes. Colleges can integrate humanistic care into course design, teaching methods, and evaluation, combining mental health courses with public and professional courses to build a

“chain” atmosphere for mental health. Student dorms and class management should address core psychological factors, using counseling, workshops, and other activities to solve issues. Colleges should also establish management and rapid response mechanisms, make mental health education compulsory, and implement differentiated management based on screening and evaluation results.

V. CONCLUSION

Given the complexity and urgency of current college mental health education, colleges must focus on positive psychology as an innovative perspective, draw on its core ideas and experiences, reevaluate educational objectives, innovate models, restructure systems, emphasize humanistic care, and foster positive environments. This will help build a mechanism and path for college mental health education that suits China’s national conditions, cultivate students’ self-esteem, confidence, and rational mindset, prevent or reduce psychological disorders, and empower high-quality educational development.

REFERENCES

Feng, L. (2023). Research on strategies of college students’ mental health education from the perspective of positive psychology. *Western Journal*, 23(12), 129-132.

Li, X., & Song, C. (2017). Research on the teaching design of college students’ mental health education courses from the perspective of positive psychology. *Higher Education Journal*, 53(5), 88-90.

Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China. (2023). Notice of the Ministry of Education and Sixteen Other Departments on Printing and Distributing the Special Action Plan for Strengthening and Improving Students’ Mental Health Work in the New Era (2023-2025). Retrieved from https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/202305/content_6857361.htm

Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5-7.

Xi, J., Ye, Y., Zuo, Z., & et al. (2019). The practice of positive psychology in school education in China. *Journal of East China Normal University (Educational Science Edition)*, 37(6), 149-159.

Xu, J. (2020). New trends in foreign language education research: The perspective of positive psychology. *English Studies*, 20(3), 155-164.