

Analysis on the Development of Mental Health Education for University Students in the New Century

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Abstract

Chinese educators have explored a localized path to promote mental health education for university students actively since the new century, a series of Chinese characteristics methods and measures has been formed, the mental health status of university students has been improved considerably, the character of aggressiveness and dedication has been shaped. Though it is only an exploration and experiment of localization, the development of mental health education in China worth of high compliment in the promotion of young people’s mental health status. The measures include: a) The Ministry of Education issued a series of mental health education policies; b) The professional supervision committee was established; c) University teacher training programs on mental health education were organized; d) Mental health courses were promoted. All these measures contributed to the thriving of university mental health education, which leded the professionalization of mental health education for university students, a variety of related activities were organized, and the mental health status of university students were improved considerably. In order to achieve further improvements, the oriental style of the mental health education for university students in China should exchange more with the western experience.

Key words: University students; Mental health education; Development; New century; Reform and opening-up

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INTRODUCTION

The social transition and the development of substantial and material life have been happening rapidly since the new century, which brings a number of challenges to the development of university students’ mental health education in China, gains mental health education increasing the attention of society. Meanwhile, China’s mental health education has been exploring a localized path of its development, a series of Chinese characteristics methods and measures has been formed, the mental health status of university students in China has been improved remarkably, and their character of the aggressiveness and dedication has been shaped.

1. BACKGROUND OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE NEW CENTURY

Since we entered the new century, university students’ mental health education has become a focus of the development of Chinese society, as well as an important mission of national education authorities and the universities.

1.1 Mental Health Education for University Students Has Become One of the Focuses of Social Development in the New Century

Mental health education for university students has been raised as the focus and goal of the social development. First, promoting the health quality including mental health status of the whole nation has been proposed as one of the goals of social development in the new century, elevating mental health education and the improvement of mental health quality to the national level, to become the evaluation criterion of social development (The Sixteenth CPC Central Committee, 2006). University students' mental health education gained the attention of the government and society, not only became the center of education, but also an important mission of the development of the nation's economic and social development (The Ninth National People's Congress, 2001; The Ministry of Education, 2012).

1.2 Mental Health Education for University Students Has Become an Important Mission of Education Authorities and Universities

In one respect, the government authorized the duty of improving university students' mental health status to the education authorities; on the other hand, the public called for universities' attention to improving university students' mental health quality, helped the students to build the characters of health, positive, kind and aggressive, and urged them to take the responsibility of mental health education. The education authorities has studied the situation and established policies to enforce mental health education for university students, the first specialized official document of mental health education for university students "Suggestions on the Promotion of Mental Health Education for University Students" was issued in 2001, which indicated the specific direction and measures of promoting mental health education for university students. The universities took the responsibility of the implementation of mental health education for university, subsumed mental health education into universities' talent training systems, added mental health courses, organized a variety of activities, disseminated mental health knowledge, and concerned for university students' mental health status.

2. MEASURES TO PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION IN THE NEW CENTURY

The education authorities and universities have carried out reforms on the methods and measures of mental health education development. The measures include four aspects as follows.

2.1 The Ministry of Education Issued Policies to Promote Mental Health Education

The policies issued by the Ministry of Education generally fall into two categories. The first category is the guiding document on education ideology and missions, such as in 2001 and 2005, the Ministry of Education issued two documents which presented the official suggestions on the promotion of mental health education for college students, the universities was required to put a high value to students' mental health education in terms of the development of the nation and society, to avoid the interference of idealism, superstitions and pseudoscience, to guarantee the scientific direction of mental health education, to take classroom teaching and out-of-class instruction as the main channel and the basic method (The Ministry of Education., 2001; CPC Central Committee & the State Council., 2004). Such policies are designed to improve the status of mental health education for college students, and provide a direction and guidance on how the work should be done. The other category is the policies on the organization and assignment of the tasks to implement mental health education in the universities, and the evaluation of the work, such as "Outline for Implementing Mental Health Education for College Students", "The Standard of Mental Health Education for College Students", guarantee the science-based hardware facilities of mental health education, and the professionalism of the practitioners. This category of policies makes mental health education for college students an implementable, practicable and empirical task, not only using the western standard for reference, but also bringing the institutional request from the government level.

2.2 Established the Professional Steering Committee on Mental Health Education for College Students

In June of 2005, the Ministry of Education established the steering committee on health education for college students, which aims to advance the mental health education in all the universities, as well as to provide research, consultation, assessment and guidance. Remarkable accomplishments have been achieved in the past ten years. The two major achievements are as follows. Firstly, the mental health education textbooks and reading materials for college students were compiled, and learned a series of effective methods of teacher training. Experts from the committee edited *Mental Health Education Reader for College Students* based on the current situation and the needs of the development of mental health education for college students in China, which then became the textbook of mental health education courses and an out-of-class reader to help college students adjust to college life and keep their mental status healthy. Secondly, the committee researched and developed the assessment system and teaching methods for college students' mental health education, the

scientificity and effectiveness were improved. The mental health assessment system was developed on the basis of the current situation of the development of college students' mental health status in China (Shen & Liang, 2006), it not only can detect the students who has mental illness, but also can examine one's mental health status and the trends, which provided theoretical support to the future course teaching.

2.3 Organized Teacher Training Programs for University Mental Health Education Courses

Qualified teacher resources for university mental health education are important guarantee for the scientificity and standardization of mental health education service. The Ministry of Education has organized "National Leading Teacher Training Class for University Mental Health Education" since 2001, mainly for making progress in the following three aspects. First, improving the professionalism of new teachers in the field of mental health education as well as those teachers without any education background in this field, based largely on the theories of psychology, education, ideological and political education. Second, promoting new counselling techniques and new teaching method of mental health education, mainly teach the counsellors and teachers with the new counselling techniques which had been proved effective through clinical practice, such as the sandplay therapy. Third, exchanging the successful experience and cases, and discussing the confusions and difficulties in the mental health education practice, aims at stimulating the mental health educators' initiatives and their ability to explore.

2.4 Strengthened the Development of Mental Health Education Courses for College Students

The development of mental health education courses in the new century were mainly achieved through the following two channels. Firstly, carrying out the official opinions on the development of mental health education courses (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, para.5, 2005), making the wide variety of mental health education courses available at college. Taking Shanghai as an example, 94% of the universities in Shanghai have offered mental health education courses in 2013, 4.3 different mental health education courses were offered averagely among these undergraduate colleges (Ma, 2013). Secondly, exploring creative teaching and evaluation methods, increasing the effectiveness of mental health education courses. In the aspect of course teaching, China University of Mining and Technology explored and practiced a teaching method called "1+5", which put more emphasis on the practical application process, make the students learn from practice (Duan, Zhao, & Song, 2004; Pan & Liu, 2007). In the aspect of course evaluation, some college teachers tried to replace preventive standard with developmental standard when evaluating course teaching performance, let mental

health education itself to develop students' potential (Liang, 2001). Some college teachers tried to build a mental health education course evaluation system based on self-reflective evaluation" (M. Yang & L. H. Yang, 2006), taking the learning effect of mental health education courses and their perception of these courses, to improve the effectiveness of course teaching.

3. THE ACHIEVEMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS SINCE THE NEW CENTURY

Mental health education for college students has flourished in China and has made considerable progress in many aspects since the new century. University mental health education has moved towards specialization, various relevant student activities have been organized, the mental health status of college students has improved significantly.

3.1 Mental Health Education Has Moved Towards Specialization

The specialization of mental health education means the process of meeting with the professional standard gradually in its own development, becoming a social vocation and gaining a scholastic position (Lu & Li, 2007). China's specialization of mental health education for college students mainly embodied in the following four aspects. Firstly, the concepts and ideas of mental health education for college students have been combined with China's national condition gradually formed an educational theory that is in accord with the actual situation of college students in China. Today, mental health education for college students bases on Marxist theory on the round development of human being, not only uses advanced foreign educational theories and mental health theories for reference, but also develops localized theories, such as "focus on building, based on education", and the theory of combining solving mental problems and solving practical problems together, etc.. Secondly, the specialized mode of mental health education have been formed in the process of practicing, such as the "three-level network" mode has been built in nationwide, which means a networked mental health education system consisted of university, school departments and student cadre. Thirdly, the development of college students' mental health education system has been specialized, the standardization and scientificity of mental health education have been regulated in each link, the mental crisis intervention approach have been formed, and the duty of counselling centers has been defined. Fourthly, the knowledge and professionalism of the teachers have been specialized, a large number of graduates specialized in psychology and education have been heading for jobs in the field of

mental health education, those who possess professional knowledge and skills of mental health education have joined the team of mental health educators. On the other hand, normalized mental health teacher training programs also have contributed to the improvement of professionalism.

3.2 Various Activities of Mental Health Education for College Students Have Been Practiced

The establishment of mental health clubs and various practices of mental health have played an important role in diffusing the knowledge of mental health, and supplemented to mental health courses. There have been three major types of practice. The first one is the publicity of mental health knowledge among college students; draw their attention to improving their own mental health. May 25 of each year is the mental health day for college students in China, a series of activities have been organized each year with one theme, guide the college students to eliminate mental illness and develop sound personalities. The second one is the establishment of mental health clubs among college students, have mental health education student cadre trained, and encouraged counselling among peers. Student associations on mental health education such as "Xin Yu Club" of Renmin University of China and the "Mental Health Association for College Students" of Zhejiang University, not only solve the mental problems of peers, but also help their own development. The third one is thematic mental health contests and practice of mental health research, showing how college students in good mental health status grow and their personal image. Such as the "Star of Mental Health Competition" and the "Greenery of Mind" of Beijing Normal University (Xu, 2006), the typical image of mentally healthy and positive college students have projected through these activities. The rich and varied mental health education practices have evoked the enthusiasm for the development and exploration of their own mind.

3.3 The Mental Health Quality of College Students Has Been Improved Considerably

The mental health quality of college students has been improved considerably through mental health education. A series of scientific assessment showed that the mental health of college students has been improved significantly. In February of 2004, the result of the application of Chinese College Students Mental Health Evaluation System in 35 universities showed that only 0.32% of the students suffered from mental illness, considerably lower than the average percentage (5%) of all Chinese population who are suffering from mental illness. The 2006 mental health assessment among 22 universities in Beijing also showed that 47% of the students are in good mental health, 3.84% higher than the result of 1998 (Huang, 2008). Thus, the population suffering from mental illness is decreasing gradually as the mental health

education for college students continues, their mental health status is improving. On the other hand, Chinese college students showed the mentalities of cool-headed, positive and endeavor. Their character of dedication and sharing of love in big events such as the Wenchuan earthquake, the 29th Beijing Olympic Games, and the Expo 2010, showed the charm of their personalities, their excellent mental outlook and attractive sound personality became the new impression of China in the new century to the world.

CONCLUSION

As we entered the new century, the rapid development of mental health education has contributed to the characters of proactivity and dedication of Chinese college students. The mental health education for college students in China is not only an exploration of localization, but also the supplement and improvement of the college students' mental health education theory and practice. However, mental health education for college students in China needs to be moved towards individualization and innovation, which requires more exchanges development mode and experience with western countries, complement each other, in order to achieve a mutual progress in mental health education for college students.

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