

A Brief Analysis on the Building of Mental-Health Counselor Team

WANG Jianfei^{[a],*}; ZHOU Ting^[b]

^[a]Changchun University Student Affairs Office, Changchun, China.

^[b]Center of Mental Health Education, Changchun University, Changchun, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

Mental-health counselors are the main force of mental-health education team in university, and the building of mental-health counselor team also serves as the main content of mental-health education in university. Through the analysis of the necessity and status quo of the building of mental-health counselor team in university, this paper puts forward several opinions and suggestions in order to promote the sustainable development of the professionalization and normalization of mental-health work in university.

Key words: University; Mental-health counselor; Team; Building

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INTRODUCTION

The development of science, competition of talents, shock of culture and explosion of information all hit the mind of college students in the current society. Psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, obsession and bigotry constantly show up when college students cope with their communication, emotion, study and career selection. With vicious events such as suicide and wounding published on the newspaper, the psychological

problems of college students draw people's attention. The demand for psychological assistance rises due to the increasing attention paid to their mental health by college students. However, universities in China are greatly short of professionals in general.

In 2011, General Office of the Ministry of Education issued *The Basic Construction Criteria of Mental-Health Education for College Students (Tentative)*, and further promoted the importance of mental-health education for college students. Meanwhile, the *Criteria* also noted that the university should have a wholesome three-level network of mental-health education in classes, departments/faculties and the university and build a team of mental-health education and psychological counseling for college students. The team should employ full-time teachers as the main force, but part-time teachers are also needed to make sure that the team is highly professional and relatively stable. It is a tough task that lies in front of student workers of how to build a team like that, especially a team of cadres and front-line mental-health counselors in departments/faculties.

1. THE STATUS QUO OF MENTAL-HEALTH COUNSELOR TEAM IN UNIVERSITY

In general, the current problems of mental-health counselor team in university in China are as follows: multiple identities, which weakens team stability; ambiguity of responsibility, which causes inadequate motivation of work; lack of professional psychological knowledge and skills; difficulty in switching between different roles.

1.1 Multiple Identities and Weak Team Stability

Nowadays, mental-health counselors are concurrently served by instructors of the college, ideological and

political workers and teachers at the Career Center at the university. Most instructors have to take multiple responsibilities. Not only do they need to deal with the daily management, ideological and political education, and emergencies for students, they also have to be responsible for the career development of students, and any task concerning students assigned by the Organization Department, Office of Academic Affairs, the Library and other functional departments. The complicated daily work has drawn much time and energy of the instructors, thus extra psychological counseling and assistance overload the work of the instructors, which will severely impact the quality of mental-health education and block them from further pursuing theoretical knowledge and professional skills.

Moreover, the instructors are appointed within the college, but student workers in university always need rotation due to the demand of job or personal development. Mental-health counselors are the major primary force of mental-health education in university, but the rotation directly leads to the weak stability of mental-health counselor team, which will seriously influence the building of professionalization of mental-health counselor education team.

1.2 Ambiguity of Responsibility and Lack of Work Motivation

Most universities failed to set the content and responsibility of mental-health counselors explicitly, making their work more passive. While mental-health counselors choose to do as told, which not only influences their whole perception of the work, but also decreases the creativity of the work and the quality of mental-health education.

In addition, effective evaluation criteria and stimulation system are lacked. The content of instructors has no obvious linkage with their achievement, promotion or career development. Therefore, many instructors think of mental-health counseling as “public interest”, since there is no difference about how much is done and whether well-done or not. All that proposed above causes the instructors to show their lack of work motivation and enthusiasm.

1.3 Lack of Psychological Knowledge and Professional Skills

Mental-health education is a work that requires more profession and operation, the important premise of which are solid theoretical foundation and abundant practice experience. However, most mental-health counselors graduate with different majors and have different discipline background and knowledge structures nowadays. Only a small amount of mental-health counselors has theoretical foundation related to psychology, and most of the mental-health counselors start their work after acquiring simple psychological knowledge in pre-job training, let alone

utilize the skills flexibly in the work. In addition, their performance will not affect their evaluation, thus they do not have the energy to study the professional knowledge, nor are they willing to do further research or hard training. Therefore, they have no idea of the entry point for various psychological problems students encounter, and thus fail to make the psychological work deeper, which greatly restricts the effective carrying out of mental-health education in university.

1.4 Difficulty in Switching Between Different Roles

Most mental-health counselors in university have done ideological and political education work for a long time, thus they tend to preach and monopolize everything like bossy parents. In their work, they also tend to pay more attention to management rather than education. When dealing with the problems of students, they either offer direct advice or order in accordance with the regulations, which are completely different from the idea and method of mental-health education work. Mental-health education requires the counselors to act as companion and a helping hand to let students solve the problems by themselves. Since the instructors do their own work for a long time and know little about psychological knowledge and professional skills, it is easily seen that they apply old methods to new problems. On the other hand, the students have unreasonable expectations and reliance for their instructors, thus they are unwilling to solve the problems independently but rely on the suggestions and solutions offered by instructors. The difficulty of switching between the original role and new role will greatly impact the effective carrying out of mental-health education in university and professionalization building of mental-health education team in university.

2. STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING THE BUILDING OF MENTAL-HEALTH COUNSELOR TEAM IN UNIVERSITY

2.1 To Upgrade the Entrance Criteria

Upgrading the entrance criteria is an important premise for building professional mental-health counselor team, since the selection of mental-health counselor in university shows strong arbitrariness and professional qualities required by psychological work. Thus, professional background, personal attainment and development potential should be fully considered when selecting mental-health counselors. The criteria must be strictly obeyed and forbid blind choice. First of all, teachers who have professional background of psychology during undergraduate or graduate study should be prioritized choices. Since these teachers have possessed abundant psychological professional knowledge, they can well

manage the job as mental-health counselors with a little training and practice. Secondly, teachers who have better mental quality, peaceful mind, stable emotion, considerate attitude and sincerity should also be given preference, since teachers with above characteristics can establish equal, credible, understanding, respected relationship with the students. Researches show that harmonious counseling relationship can achieve good effect even without special techniques of psychological counseling. Thirdly, teachers who have strong learning ability, dare to innovate and are enthusiastic about the job are preferred. Though many teachers do not have the professional background of psychology, they can still be qualified for this job after training and practicing for some time as long as they have strong learning ability and are willing to learn constantly.

2.2 To Strengthen Institutional Construction

As the foundation of team building, institutional construction should include three parts: explicitness of responsibility, normalizing evaluation system, and setting reward system. First of all, the content and effect of mental-health counselors' work should be explicitly regulated. It is not only the primary basis of the daily work of mental-health counselors, but also the crucial standard to assess their work. Most mental-health counselors have multiple identities, making their daily work trivial and complicated. In addition, they have inadequate understanding of psychological work. If the responsibility of psychological work they concurrently undertake is ambiguous, the teachers can easily lose their enthusiasm and suffer job burnout much earlier. Secondly, evaluation should be normalized. The property and content of mental-health counselors are different from that of general teachers or instructors. Therefore, following the existing evaluation system for teachers is neither scientific nor reasonable when assessing the work of mental-health counselors. A well-matched evaluation system should be established in accordance with the characteristics of mental-health counselors' work. The result of evaluation should be linked to the assessment of professional title and promotion, which can stimulate the initiative and enthusiasm of mental-health counselors to the greatest extent. Meanwhile, senior mental-health counselors should be encouraged to stay at the front line of student work. Thirdly, reward system should be established. Mental-health counselor team is generally young and has strong upward mobility. Establishing a proper reward system can greatly stimulate the enthusiasm of the counselors, thus enhance their self-promotion and the stability of the team. Material reward can include extra bonus and welfare, while spiritual reward can include professional title promotion, awards and opportunities for further study. The reward policy should give priority to front-line mental-health counselors in order to promote their enthusiasm and

offer them platform for growth. A good system is the basic guarantee of the virtuous sustainable development of mental-health counselor team.

2.3 To Enhance Professional Quality

Mastering the professional knowledge and skills of psychology systematically is the important basis of building professional mental-health counselor team. Each university should establish a set of complete training plan specifically, special training expenditure, and long-term training system. A variety of training programs also need to be organized to make sure that the theoretical knowledge and practical skills of mental-health counselors can be effectively improved. Firstly, outstanding mental-health counselors should be selected at regular intervals to take the Psychological Consultant National Qualification Examination, which helps mental-health counselors fully understand the professional knowledge and skills of psychology. Meanwhile, the acquisition of the certificate recognizes the professionalism of their work, which also leads the mental-health counselor team to a scientific, normalized and professional road. Secondly, mental-health counselors should be constantly organized to take part in specific training held by professional psychological institutions, which not only widen their horizon and enhance their specific psychological skills, but also inspire them to work hard and make constant progress. Thirdly, inter-university visit, study and discussion should be constantly organized in order to enrich the knowledge of mental-health counselors. They can also improve themselves and learn from their counterparts in other universities through sharing experiences. Fourthly, collective learning, such as organizing supervising group regularly, thematic lectures on psychology and psychological colloquium, should be constantly organized for psychological staff. Through various collective learning, the professional level of mental-health counselors can be effectively enhanced. Meanwhile, the interaction among psychological staff can also be strengthened, resource sharing can be achieved, and the cohesion of mental-health counselor team is thus enhanced.

2.4 To Pay Attention to Role Switching

Mental-health counselors are professionals who help students to solve problems and carry out psychological work. They are the guide who leads the students to grow healthily. Therefore, they should neither preach nor monopolize with tough management method, which is responsible for both students and their work. They should not only fully respect the demand and interest of students, but also offer them opportunities to grow up. However, most mental-health counselors, affected by their own work as long-time educators, will employ preaching as the solution to the problems of students, which go far against

the purpose of psychological work. Therefore, a qualified mental-health counselor should transform his idea and method of work through changing from being active to being passive, from preaching to listen, from help to self-help, from monopolizing to autonomous growth. Only by following the above working idea can be a mental-health counselor possesses exquisite business.

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