

The Intersection of Mental Health and Discipline in Higher Education: Supporting Students with Emotional and Behavioral Challenges

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ABSTRACT

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This paper focuses on the field of higher education and explores the intersection of mental health and discipline. It aims to explore the close relationship between mental health and discipline, with a special focus on students facing emotional and behavioral challenges. The connotation and relationship between the two are analyzed, and the current situation and root causes of student's mental health and discipline problems are deeply analyzed. Coping strategies are proposed from the aspects of strengthening mental health education and improving the discipline education system, and the effectiveness and shortcomings are analyzed in combination with practical cases. Research shows that the relationship between classroom discipline and mental health is also cyclical. Students' mental health problems may lead to the relaxation of classroom discipline. On the contrary, classroom discipline will be relatively strict if students are in good mental health. Paying attention to the intersection of the two can provide strong support for students' growth and provide a reference for the development of higher education. Researchers believe that the close balance between mental health and classroom discipline is something that every teacher needs to learn and study in depth.

Keywords: discipline, emotional and behavioral challenges, higher education, mental health

INTRODUCTION

In the field of higher education, students' mental health and discipline compliance play a vital role in their own growth. In recent years, with the intensification of social competition, the increase of academic pressure, and the impact of multiculturalism, the phenomenon of emotional and behavioral challenges in college students have become more and more frequent[1], which not only hinders the development of students themselves but also poses a severe test to

the educational management of colleges and universities. Therefore, in-depth exploration of the intersection of mental health and discipline and seeking effective ways to support students with emotional and behavioral challenges have become important issues that need to be urgently addressed in the field of higher education.

Past studies have mostly focused on the single dimension of mental health or discipline education, and the analysis of the internal connection and synergy between the two is relatively scarce. Although some studies involve relevant content, they often remain at the level of theoretical explanation, lack strong support from empirical research, and are difficult to effectively guide educational practice. This study aims to fill this gap, comprehensively using methods such as literature analysis and case study deeply explore the internal connection between mental health and discipline, analyze the root causes of students' emotional and behavioral problems, and propose targeted and feasible intervention strategies and support systems, to provide new ideas and methods for college educators, and help students with emotional and behavioral challenges get back on track and achieve comprehensive development.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND DISCIPLINE ISSUES

2.1 Concept and Theoretical Basis

Mental health is a state that fluctuates due to biological and social factors. It enables individuals to achieve a satisfactory integration of their potential conflicting instinctive impulses; to form and maintain harmonious relationships with others; and to participate in constructive changes in their social and material environment. [The World Health Organization (WHO), 1950] Mental health is a multidimensional concept that covers many aspects of an individual's emotions, cognition, and sociality[3]. From the perspective of emotions, mental health means that an individual can reasonably express and effectively regulate his or her emotions, maintain relative emotional stability, and avoid long-term intrusion of negative emotions such as excessive anxiety, depression, and anger; cognitive aspects are manifested as clear thinking, good learning ability, objective self-cognition, and reasonable problem-solving strategies; social aspects are manifested as the ability to establish and maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships, good communication skills, empathy, and cooperation, and adapt to different social situations.

The consequences of behavior determine the probability that the behavior will occur again. Reinforcers strengthen behavior; punishments weaken it. This principle applies equally to children and adults, in settings as diverse as education, parenting, and therapy. [B.F. Skinner, (1953), *Science and Human Behavior*] Discipline refers to the rules and regulations that members must abide by in order to safeguard collective interests and ensure the progress of work. It has the characteristics of sociality, history, class, and compulsion. It is the basic principle for maintaining the normal operation of society, organizations, or groups, and aims to ensure order, fairness, and efficiency. In the field of education, discipline is related to the creation of a learning atmosphere, the shaping of moral character, and the cultivation of rule awareness for students, providing external guarantees for their growth.

Emotional and behavioral challenges refer to the deviation of individuals from the norm in emotional expression, emotional management, and behavioral performance, such as frequent emotional outbursts, excessive withdrawal, aggressive behavior, lack of concentration, lack of learning motivation, etc. These problems seriously affect students' academic progress, social integration, and physical and mental health development.

Discipline in education should be viewed as a form of social regulation which emerges naturally through cooperation

and understanding within the community, rather than as a form of imposed control. (John Dewey, 1916, *Democracy and Education*) These three are closely linked and influence each other. Students with poor mental health are often more likely to violate discipline. On the contrary, if they are in a lax discipline environment for a long time, students may be frequently criticized and blamed, which will affect their self-cognition and emotional state, breed negative emotions such as anxiety and rebellion, form a vicious circle, and aggravate psychological problems[5].

The ABC theory of emotions was proposed by American psychologist Albert Ellis (1962). The theory believes that the triggering event A is only an indirect cause of the emotional and behavioral consequences of C, while the direct cause of C is the belief B generated by the individual's cognition and evaluation of the triggering event A. On campus, for the same stimulating event A of failing an exam, students who hold the belief B that "failure once means never succeeding" may experience extremely depressed and depressed emotions and behavioral consequences C; while students who hold the belief that "failure is the mother of success and we can learn from it" are more likely to face it positively and catch up. This inspires educators to pay attention to students' belief systems, guide them to establish positive and reasonable beliefs, and prevent and resolve emotional and behavioral problems.

Behaviorism theory (John B. Watson, 1913) emphasizes the shaping and control of behavior by external stimuli. In educational practice, teachers can use rewards to strengthen students' good discipline behavior, suppress violations of discipline through timely correction and appropriate punishment, and help students gradually develop the habit of abiding by discipline. Create a suitable learning and living environment for students with emotional and behavioral challenges, reduce adverse stimuli, and guide them to shape positive behavior patterns.

Humanistic theory (Abraham Maslow & Carl Rogers) emphasizes that individuals have the internal motivation for self-growth and self-repair. Social learning theory points out that individuals learn from the behavior and results of others by observing and learning, and then acquire new behavioral response patterns. Educators should respect and understand students and be good at setting positive examples. Guide students to conduct positive observation and learning, let students feel their own value and acceptance, and help their mental health and discipline awareness develop in a coordinated manner.

2.2 Challenges of students' emotions and behaviors

Discipline has a restraining and guiding effect on students' mental health, giving them clear behavioral boundaries and a sense of direction so that they can feel safe. In the process of abiding by discipline, students gradually learn to control themselves, suppress impulsive behaviors, and then cultivate strong willpower.

Good mental health is the inherent cornerstone for students to consciously abide by discipline. Mentally healthy students usually have strong self-awareness, and can objectively recognize their own strengths and weaknesses, interests and hobbies, and ability boundaries, so as to reasonably plan their studies and lives according to their own circumstances, and consciously follow the school's rules and regulations. They have positive emotional regulation ability, can remain calm when facing pressure, frustration, or temptation, use appropriate methods to resolve negative emotions, and avoid violating discipline due to emotional out-of-control. Students with empathy can better understand the feelings of others, respect collective rules, actively maintain a harmonious campus atmosphere, and internalize discipline into their own behavioral habits.

However, in reality, some students have emotional and behavioral challenges. Students with difficulty in regulating emotions often find it difficult to concentrate on their studies under the strong impact of negative emotions. They often seek temporary catharsis by breaking discipline because they cannot resolve their inner pain, and fall into a vicious cycle of emotions and behaviors. Students with impulsive behavior and poor self-control are easily disturbed by external stimuli and make unthinking violations of discipline. Once these violations are criticized or punished, they will further undermine their self-confidence, increase their psychological burden, and affect their mental health development[6].

From the perspective of different majors, genders, and other dimensions, students' emotional and behavioral challenges vary[8]. College students are under the pressure of further study and employment competition. Anxiety and confusion are more common. Some students may try to gain advantages through academic misconduct, internship fraud, and other behaviors.



"Du Shi"

Jiang FeiHong



"Zi Zai Xing zou "

Jiang FeiHong



"Maiden's Troubles"

Jiang FeiHong

Through surveys of many universities, it was found that freshmen had different degrees of maladjustment problems in the early stage of enrollment, and some students had violated dormitory work and rest discipline; in the course assessment of science and engineering majors, on average, students were punished for academic misconduct every semester; and in liberal arts majors dominated by female students, classroom discipline problems caused by interpersonal conflicts are prone to occur. These studies show that students' emotional and behavioral challenges vary among different groups, and college educators need to accurately identify and classify them in order to respond effectively.

Analysis of the Current Situation of Students' Mental Health and Discipline Problems

In the current higher education environment, students' mental health problems present a diverse and complex situation. Students are full of worries and anxieties about their academic performance, future career development, interpersonal relationships, etc., and even have somatic symptoms; depression cannot be ignored. Some students have been in a low mood for a long time, lose interest in learning and life, have serious self-denial, and feel that they are worthless. Self-identity problems are also relatively common. Some students frequently compare themselves with others due to lack of self-confidence, and fall into confusion and confusion. Student discipline problems are also common, covering classroom and campus violations.



"In College"
Jiang FeiHong



"Scream in Silent "
Jiang FeiHong



"Self in Heart"
Jiang FeiHong

Mental health problems and discipline problems are intertwined, forming a vicious circle. Students with discipline problems due to psychological problems are prone to disciplinary violations. Once they are punished by the school, they will further increase the psychological burden of students and become more resistant to school discipline and management. Students who frequently violate school rules and regulations are prone to rebellious psychology, lose confidence in learning and campus life, breed negative emotions such as anxiety and depression, and affect mental health development[9].

Relevant surveys show that among students with discipline problems caused by psychological problems in colleges and universities, violations caused by anxiety and depression are the most prominent[10]. After being punished, these students have different degrees of aggravated psychological disorders. If colleges and universities do not intervene effectively and promptly, it will seriously hinder the growth of students.

RESULTS

4.1 Strengthen mental health education

Colleges and universities should build a systematic and scientific mental health education curriculum system to meet the diverse needs of students. Equip professional psychological counselors, expand diversified counseling forms, provide support for students in a psychological crisis, and provide students with initial psychological support and referral services. Establishing and improving the psychological crisis early warning mechanism is a key link.[12] Screen students' psychological conditions, establish a mental health file for each student based on the daily observations of counselors, class teachers, and teachers, dynamically update psychological assessment results and consultation records, and achieve full tracking management. Ensure the physical and mental safety of students[14].

In terms of course content, in addition to covering basic psychological knowledge, practical course modules should be added. Such as emotion management courses, interpersonal communication courses, stress coping courses, etc. Teaching methods should abandon the traditional single lecture mode and incorporate diversified teaching methods. Case teaching methods should select real and representative cases inside and outside the campus. Experiential teaching can enable students to cultivate empathy and self-confidence in practice through psychological development training and group counseling activities. At the same time, with the help of multimedia resources, abstract knowledge can be presented in a vivid way to deepen students' understanding and memory.

Practical activities are an important extension of mental health education. Colleges and universities can organize activities themed on mental health to inspire students to pay attention to mental health. Professional teachers can

provide guidance psychological counseling and lectures. They can also establish mental health practice bases and cooperate with the community to expose students to real cases and enhance their sense of social responsibility.

DISCUSSION

5.1 Integration of mental health and discipline

Integrating mental health and discipline education into subject teaching is an important way to achieve the integration of the two. Each subject contains rich mental health and discipline education resources. Teachers should be good at exploring and utilizing these resources to achieve the organic unity of knowledge imparting and moral cultivation.

Taking Chinese teaching as an example, when explaining literary works, teachers can guide students to analyze the psychological changes and behavioral choices of the characters in the works, so that students can experience the importance of good moral character and compliance with rules for personal growth. In mathematics teaching, we emphasize the rigor of logic and the standardization of steps and cultivate students' rigorous and serious learning attitude and the habit of abiding by campus discipline rules. Incorporating discipline education content into mental health education courses can make education more targeted and effective.

Experiential teaching methods and case teaching methods are effective means to promote the integration of mental health and discipline education. By creating simulated scenes, let students experience the sense of order and security brought by abiding by discipline, as well as the chaos and consequences caused by violating discipline. Guide students to practice emotional regulation methods in a simulated environment, observe their own and others' behavioral reactions, and improve their emotional management and interpersonal communication skills.

The case teaching method selects real and representative campus stories to trigger students' deep thinking and discussion. Encourage students to face challenges with a positive attitude, show themselves in collective activities, improve their abilities, and contribute to creating a healthy and harmonious campus environment.

5.2 Integration in Class Management

As the basic unit of students' learning and life, the quality of the class atmosphere is directly related to the student's growth experience. Creating a positive, inclusive, and harmonious class atmosphere is a key measure to help students develop mental health and strengthen their sense of discipline.

Enhance class cohesion by organizing rich and colorful class activities. Cultivate a spirit of teamwork, learn to trust and rely on peers, release learning pressure, and devote themselves to learning life with more enthusiasm.

Paying attention to the individual needs of students cannot be ignored. Each student has a unique personality, interest, and growth background[16]. Teachers should be aware of students' emotional changes and academic troubles, and give timely care and support. Building a harmonious relationship between teachers students and classmates is the core task of class management. Teachers should get along with students in an equal, respectful, and caring manner, listen to students' voices patiently, pay full attention and respond, let students feel respected, and thus inspire them to take the initiative to abide by discipline and maintain class honor. Students should advocate a mutual help and tolerance model to grow and progress together. In class management, teachers need to pay special

attention to students with special needs, unite parents, psychologists, and other forces, deeply understand the root causes of students' problems, and develop personalized education support plans. Use spare time to patiently tutor them, encourage them to regain confidence in learning, fundamentally reduce violations caused by learning pressure, and promote the healthy physical and mental growth of students.



"Expect a Wish"
Jiang FeiHong



"Gaze from Teacher"
Jiang FeiHong



"Future-Us"
Jiang FeiHong

CONCLUSION

This study deeply analyzes the close relationship between mental health and discipline of middle school students in the field of higher education, revealing the complex relationship of mutual influence and mutual cause and effect between the two. Mental health problems are often the internal root cause of discipline problems, and discipline problems can easily cause or aggravate students' psychological distress, forming a vicious circle and seriously hindering students' growth and development.

Through comprehensive analysis of a large amount of literature and in-depth research of empirical research, researchers have identified the multi-level roots of students' emotional and behavioral challenges, covering individual physiological and psychological characteristics, family education methods and atmosphere, school education models and resource allocation, and social and cultural trends and employment pressure.

In order to effectively support students with emotional and behavioral challenges, this study proposes a set of systematic coping strategies[17]. In terms of mental health education, it emphasizes the optimization of the curriculum system, integrates practical content modules, and improves students' psychological adjustment ability; psychological counseling services should be upgraded, equipped with professional and sufficient counselors, expand diversified counseling forms, and establish a sound psychological crisis warning mechanism to ensure that students can get timely and precise assistance. The disciplined education system needs to be innovative, and fresh cases should be integrated into the teaching content to explain the close connection between discipline personal growth, and social harmony. At the same time, when enforcing discipline, we should adhere to the concept of humanity, pay attention to individual differences among students, and mainly use education and guidance, supplemented by necessary punishment measures. Creating a good campus atmosphere is also critical. By refining a unique campus culture, carrying out rich academic and cultural activities, and advocating mutual assistance and support among students, we can create a warm, inclusive, and enterprising growth environment for students. In addition, the collaborative cooperation between home, school, and society is the core force in solving problems. Families, schools, and society should perform their respective duties and work closely together to form a comprehensive and multi-level support

network to jointly help students develop physically and mentally[19].

Solving the mental health and discipline problems of students in higher education is a systematic project that requires continuous efforts and collaborative innovation from all parties. This study hopes to provide useful references for practice and research in this field, arouse the attention and thinking of more educators and researchers, jointly lay the foundation for a better future for students, and promote higher education to a higher quality development stage.

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