

The Relationship Between Self-control and Psychological Stress among College Students

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Abstract: The intensification of competition for further education and employment brought about by the development of the times has led to a sharp increase in psychological pressure on contemporary college students. The mental health of college students has become a social issue of common concern for parents and various groups in society. This article focuses on the relationship between self-control and psychological stress among college students. Through analysis of existing literature and research, it is found that college students with high levels of self-control are able to demonstrate stronger adaptability and lower psychological distress when facing academic, interpersonal, and economic pressures. This is mainly because individuals with higher self-control abilities have more disposable self-control resources compared to those with lower self-control abilities, so the resources allocated to psychological stress are more sufficient and can better control psychological stress. This study has important reference significance for alleviating psychological stress among college students and promoting the strengthening and improvement of student mental health education by the government and various social groups. In the future, further refinement can be made in the operationalization of the aforementioned variables to facilitate in-depth research on this topic.

Keywords: College students, self-control, psychological pressure

1. Introduction

The mental health of college students has become a social problem concern for parents and all other social groups. With the development of the times, the competition for higher education and employment has intensified. The increase in life uncertainty greatly increases the psychological pressure on college students, and the probability of psychological problems for college students increases year by year. The Ministry of Education issued a directive on July 21, 2021, to enhance the management of students' mental health, aiming to boost the relevance and efficiency of their mental health efforts, bolster professional assistance and scientific handling, and endeavor to elevate students' understanding of mental health. The Ministry of Education plans to enhance and fortify mental health education for students in 2022, execute their mental health advocacy strategies, and excel in scientific recognition, immediate early alerts, expert advice, and appropriate reactions. Ensuring the psychological well-being of college students necessitates addressing the issue of their psychological stress.

Self-control plays a crucial role in regulating emotions and behaviors, thereby aiding in the management of psychological stress. A multitude of research indicates a strong connection between self-discipline and mental stress. People possessing robust self-discipline tend to regulate their feelings and actions more efficiently under stress, thereby diminishing the adverse impacts of mental stress. Conversely, psychological stress can impact a person's self-discipline, complicating their ability to stay composed and logical when confronted with obstacles.

The relationship between behavior and psychological stress has always been one of the important issues that researchers at home and abroad pay attention to. Since the 1990s, the research on the correlation between self-control and psychological stress has gradually emerged, and the research on the resource model of self-control has also made new progress. However, there are still few studies on the relationship between self-control and psychological stress. Especially in the field of college students, there are still gaps in the research. What is the relationship between self-control and psychological stress for college students? How does the level of self-control affect the level of psychological stress? The discussion of these problems is of great significance for relieving the psychological pressure of college students and promoting the strengthening and improving the education of students' mental health. Through the research method of systematic review, this paper explores the source of psychological stress and self-control methods and puts forward suggestions.

2. Psychological Stress

2.1. Concept of Psychological Stress

Psychological stress is a kind of psychological and physiological tension perceived by individuals in the face of external environmental stimuli and is the adaptive response of the human body to various stressors. At present, the research on psychological stress mainly focuses on the causes of stress and the ways of coping with stress.

2.2. Sources of Psychological Stress

Kim, K, et al. believe that the main stressors of Chinese college students are daily troubles, including economic problems, learning problems, interpersonal problems with classmates and teachers, emotional problems, sexual troubles, self-identity, self-esteem, and other problems [1]. Jia Junfei, an academic specializing in domestic studies, attributes the mental strain on Chinese university students to various factors: challenges in adapting and changing roles, alterations in learning styles leading to diminished learning drive, interpersonal strain due to communication barriers and poor communication skills, financial and psychological strain stemming from family financial struggles, job stress due to harsh job conditions and intense talent rivalry, insufficient sexual understanding and perceptions of love, psychological strain from immaturity, psychological strain from personality and emotional issues, and various situational occurrences [2].

2.3. Coping Strategies for Psychological Stress

As for the coping strategies for psychological stress, Zhang Jianwei et al. tested 660 college students in Beijing with the questionnaire compiled by Carver et al. The study found that college students cope with pressure in eight ways: active planning and action, seeking social support, acceptance, seeking religion, stagnation and abandonment, active restraint, emotional relaxation, and psychological relief. The top three coping styles of each grade are active planning and action, acceptance, and active restraint, while the bottom three are recourse to religion, stagnation and abandonment, and psychological liberation [3]. According to these methods, active planning and action is the most effective way, and reasonable arrangement of study and rest time can reduce the pressure brought by

study. Setting realistic and achievable goals can help avoid the frustration that comes with setting their goals too high. For acceptance and active restraint, college students can adopt emotional regulation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, and mindfulness exercises. These strategies are closely related to self-control, and by improving their self-control ability, college students can better cope with psychological stress and improve their overall quality of life.

3. Self-control

3.1. The Concept of Self-control

Kopp et al. proposed that self-control refers to an individual's ability to consciously adjust his or her behavior to conform to personal values and social expectations [4]. This ability enables individuals to suppress impulses, resist temptation, delay immediate gratification, develop and execute action plans, and exhibit appropriate behavior in appropriate social contexts. Self-control is a key factor in personal growth and social adaptation, helping individuals to remain rational and self-controlled in the face of various challenges, thus making decisions that are more conducive to long-term goals [4].

3.2. Theoretical Model of Self-control

The conceptual framework for self-regulation originates from examining its intrinsic mechanism architecture. Currently, the predominant models employed are Hofmann et al.'s dual system framework and Baumeister et al.'s self-control model with limited resources.

3.2.1. Dual System Model

The Dual-Process Model serves as a conceptual structure within the realms of psychology and cognitive science. According to this framework, a comprehensive self-control model encompasses, initially, the impulse system. This mechanism triggers impulsive actions; when tempted, it instinctively triggers similar reactions, encompassing both emotional and approach-avoidance responses. This method benefits from its rapid response in intricate or urgent scenarios, conserving both time and energy, yet its reliance on intuition makes it prone to emotional biases and misjudgments. Secondly, there's the system of self-discipline. The system plays a key role in facilitating advanced mental processes when confronted with temptation, encompassing criteria for careful assessment and inhibition. Thirdly, consider the state or characteristic moderating factors. The variable acting as a moderator alters how self-control and impulse power affect behavioral outcomes [5]. Enhancing self-control involves individuals honing their planning and organizational skills and establishing clear objectives through the fortification of their self-control mechanisms.

3.2.2. Finite Resource Model

Baumeister and others suggested the constrained theory of self-control. This suggests that a person's capacity for self-discipline must deplete its resources, and these resources are finite over time.

Additionally, there is a connection between the resources for self-control and the patterns of self-control in individuals. Effective self-discipline actions hinge on the resources at hand for self-control. An abundance of self-control resources correlates with improved execution of self-control activities. Given the limited quantity of resources available, every instance of self-discipline diminishes the energy level in the pool of resources in proportion. The term "Ego-Depletion Effect" refers to the diminishing of control power. Self-control resources are broadly applicable across various domains, with every type of self-control behavior utilizing identical self-control resources. Furthermore, resting in a manner akin to a muscle can rejuvenate one's self-discipline [6].

4. The Link between Self-discipline and Mental Stress

Numerous research works have established a significant connection between self-discipline and mental stress. Du Wenling, a local academic, along with others, theorizes that the stress experienced by college students in their academic pursuits, social interactions, and future planning frequently correlates with their capacity for self-discipline. As an illustration, students under identical academic stress might be more susceptible to mental issues like anxiety and depression due to reduced self-discipline. Conversely, students possessing robust self-discipline are more adept at managing these stressors and sustaining an optimistic mindset and conduct [7]. Furthermore, self-control research has verified a notable link between self-discipline, mental well-being, and emotional states [8, 9]. These studies generally believe that the improvement of self-control ability helps to enhance individual mental toughness and reduce the damage of psychological stress to mental health.

There are differences in self-control and psychological stress among college students of different genders. Chen Hui et al. believe that there are gender differences in self-control among college students, and female students in the same grade have better self-control abilities than male students [10]. Through the analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire compiled based on the Psychological Stress Scale of college students, Xu Mingxing learned that the annoyance degree of male students in the same grade was higher than that of female students [11, 12]. Based on the above-mentioned ways of coping with the psychological pressure of college students, the way of "active restraint" ranks in the top three. It can be inferred that because female students in the same grade have higher self-control ability than male students, they can better cope with psychological pressure, so the degree of psychological pressure is lower than that of male students. On the basis of the existence of gender differences, the self-control ability of college students is negatively correlated with psychological stress. That is, the stronger the self-control ability, the lower the psychological stress.

The energy model of self-control also accounts for the inverse relationship observed between self-discipline and mental stress. The energy model of self-control notes a connection between the resources of self-control and the behaviors of individuals in self-control. The effectiveness of self-control actions hinges on the presence of self-control resources, and an abundance of these resources leads to superior performance in self-control tasks. In contrast to those with lesser self-control skills, those with greater self-control capabilities possess more resources for self-control, leading to a more sufficient allocation of resources for psychological stress and improved management of it, resulting in a reduced level of psychological pressure.

5. Suggestions

Studies indicate a notable inverse relationship between self-discipline and mental stress among college students. The author advocates for intervening in self-control to alleviate mental stress and ensure college students' mental well-being, aiming to enhance their capacity for self-discipline in reaching their objectives. Should short-term psychological stress arise and there's an immediate need to distribute self-control resources, strategies can be employed to replenish these lost resources. For instance, the deliberate induction of positive emotions serves as a crucial technique for reinstating self-discipline resources. Tice and colleagues study revealed that individuals experiencing self-depletion would markedly enhance their self-depletion condition if they viewed a comedy video [6]. University students have the opportunity to unwind effectively during their free time, by selectively viewing uplifting and engaging videos or articles to foster positive feelings, thereby recuperating self-discipline and enhancing their self-discipline swiftly. Nonetheless, enhancing self-control over an extended period is more achievable. Self-control, as per the limited-resource theory, is likened to a "muscle" that gains strength through repeated practice. The research by Oaten and Cheng revealed that a regimen of two weeks of uninterrupted physical activity, four weeks of financial oversight, and

four weeks of consistent reading not only enhances participants' self-discipline but also broadens its impact on various life aspects, aligning with the power model's hypothesis that self-control energy is widespread in the field [13]. In essence, people can improve their self-discipline by consistently engaging in the same activity. College students have the option to engage in physical activities, consistent reading, and various daily routines to establish precise objectives and manage their time effectively. This approach not only enhances their self-discipline but also fosters the cultivation of beneficial and wholesome lifestyle practices, collectively reducing mental stress.

6. Conclusion

This study found that there was a negative correlation between group self-control and psychological stress, that is, the higher the self-control ability, the lower the degree of psychological stress. Therefore, it is suggested that college students should choose between short-term needs and long-term goals to improve their self-control ability and relieve psychological pressure by watching active and interesting videos or establishing repetitive exercise goals such as physical exercise or regular reading. This study accurately proposed the relationship between self-control and psychological stress in college students, made up for some of the gaps in related research, and proposed two exact and feasible methods for college students. This is conducive to college students learning autonomy, improving their self-control ability, and relieving psychological pressure. At the same time, it also has important reference significance for promoting and improving students' mental health education.

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