

Analysis of the Psychological Needs and Coping Strategies of the Current Chinese Teenagers

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Abstract: The psychological need is not a new concept. It affects every aspect of a person in the normal process of survival. When material life is gradually satisfied, and people have begun to pursue a spiritual life, the satisfaction of psychological needs seems necessary to realize everyday life. Such a changing trend has naturally attracted the attention of many researchers. In recent years, mental health problems or mental diseases have occurred in more and more adolescents, and the satisfaction of psychological needs has become a new research direction for relevant scholars to study the prevention and intervention of adolescent mental health problems. Therefore, this paper focuses on China, which has already started to pay attention to the development of mental health education and takes Chinese adolescents as the research object. Based on the relevant research data and literature in recent years, this paper discusses and analyzes the psychological needs of Chinese adolescents and practical strategies that can be applied in daily education work. According to the discussion, the psychological needs of Chinese teenagers are not very different from those of normal teenagers in other countries. Still, they have a stronger desire to meet specific psychological needs in some situations.

Keywords: Adolescence; Chinese adolescents; Psychological needs; Mental health; School or family education

1. Introduction

The psychological need is both a familiar professional term and an internal element each of us has. According to the definition given by relevant experts, psychological needs are the needs generated by individuals according to their thoughts and intentions and different emotional needs [1]. In this modern society, where material life has become rich and colourful, it is relatively easy to meet material needs. In contrast, the enrichment of spiritual life or the satisfaction of various psychological needs seems to be the new pursuit of people of different ages or even a 'life necessity'. When the basic psychological needs are not met, the psychological development of some people may be affected, resulting in various problems which may affect their normal life, such as depression [2]. For teenagers, puberty is a unique psychological need arising from adolescents' ego enhancement stage [3]. Mature cognitive systems, thoughts and emotions that are volatile and have not yet been perfected, subjective judgment, and so on are peculiar to young people in this period of unique things. If teenagers' psychological needs are not adequately met, these characteristics will play a negative role. According to a survey in the United States, 70% of adolescent participants said

they had many mental needs in different environments but were not satisfied accordingly; of these, 20-30% suffer from some degree of depression [4].

In contrast, China's National Mental Health Development Report (2019-2020), released by the Institute of Psychology of the National Academy of Sciences, shows that more than half of young people aged 14 to 35 suffer from anxiety of various degrees. For adolescents alone, 24.6% reported depression, and at least 7.4% reported major depressive symptoms [5]. It can be seen that, to a certain extent, the satisfaction of psychological needs is crucial to the healthy development of adolescents. In other words, the satisfaction of psychological needs can be a good starting point for studying the prevention and intervention of adolescent mental health problems.

Thus, this paper will select Chinese adolescents as the research objects, combined with the relevant data and materials from the past 20 years, to explore more effective education strategies and related prevention or intervention methods for mental health problems from the perspective of meeting psychological needs.

2. Psychological Needs

In China, because of the large population, the pressure brought by social competition is also increasing and even gradually transferring to the younger generation. As a result, people began to care more about children's grades and academic performance. After all, good grades mean stronger learning ability, better access to high schools and universities, more substantial social competitiveness, better jobs and a happier future. However, excessive emphasis on credits and grades leads adults to ignore children's emotional experiences and psychological needs [6]. Moreover, with the increasing incidence of mental health problems in children and adolescents and even more frequent news reports of suicides due to various mental issues, the development of mental health in children and adolescents has received renewed attention.

From around the age of 10, children begin to reach puberty. Some experts point out that this period is a particular time for decision-making, self-discovery, and the formation of essential aspirations in life [7] [8]. They will have different psychological needs due to their different experiences and other influencing factors, some of which align with some needs theories (such as Maslow's hierarchy of Needs theory), and some may not be common. The psychological needs mentioned in this paper are based on the relevant cases, research data, and literature in previous years and are common in most Chinese teenagers.

2.1. Sexual Needs

After puberty, secondary sexual characteristics will gradually appear. Teenagers have different ideas and feelings about the physical structure of their bodies and their partners of the opposite sex. This change or phenomenon is called the sexual drive of adolescence and is a physiological need based on the normal physiological development of the body. However, some experts who have studied the issue of puppy love among Chinese adolescents have suggested that sexual need is not only a physical need but also a psychological need derived from physical, sexual impulse [9]. Children's curiosity and desire for love make them want to try to form new heterosexual relationships. Specifically, when they encounter problems dealing with parents or teachers, they need to seek more comfort, understanding and support from other close relationships. These young people affected by physiological reactions will naturally upgrade peer relationships to more intimate romantic relationships. Statistics show that after family and teachers, their peers are the ones who spend the most time with them. After all, peers are the people who spend the most time with them besides their families and teachers [10].

However, the rate of physical and mental development of adolescents is not consistent. Although they have sexual urges and related psychological needs, they do not have sufficient psychological preparation or correct judgment to bear all the possible consequences. Once the sex drive turns into action, the disadvantages often outweigh the advantages.

2.2. Esteem

Children typically develop concepts and awareness of self-esteem starting around the age of 3 years and then gradually grow with the formation of self-identity during adolescence [11, 12]. Self-esteem can make teenagers more confident and mentally strong to face more complex challenges and bear more pressure. In addition to adolescents' respect for the individual, acquisition and maintenance of self-esteem also come from the care of the people around them.

According to relevant data, in order to improve their children's competitiveness, many Chinese parents focus solely on academic performance and even deliberately stimulate and harm their children's self-esteem with words or actions in response to poor test results [13]. However, excessive criticism not only does not produce reverse learning motivation for children but also may cause more serious psychological problems or form more negative values. For example, one statistic shows that aggressive students, or teenagers who are prone to risky sex at school, have lower levels of confidence and self-esteem. However, these behaviours are their way of trying to regain respect through force or strong strength [14].

2.3. Attachment

The satisfaction of attachment needs is based on stable and intimate relationships. It is usually the parents or close elders (including teachers) that children tend to have such thoughts or specific attachment behaviours. Cooper et al. report that adolescents with secure attachment are less likely to have emotional or social problems than their peers with other types [15]. In subsequent studies, more data confirmed this conclusion. During the process of studying the parent-child relationship and the influence of family structure on adolescents, Chinese experts have found that if the parent-child relationship does not develop stably, such as the divorce of parents, the attachment needs of adolescents will not continue to be satisfied [16]. In the long run, adolescents in such environments are more likely to lack a sense of security and belonging, leading to a high risk of negative emotions and mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and self-blame [17]. In addition, in some practical cases, some teenagers will be tired of learning because they have no apparent sense of attachment and belonging to the school and teachers, which even cause a high dropout rate [18].

2.4. Autonomy and Independence

When teenagers enter adolescence, they begin to have a sense of independence and hold formed but undeveloped judgment, values and future assumptions. They need a relatively free space to realize a certain degree of independent choice to think, release pressure or emotions and promote independent development [13]. A significant attempt to meet their need for independence is to gradually break away from the complete control of their parents and teachers over their lives and learning interests [19].

For some Chinese parents, strictly limiting their children's social scope and making friends is an outward manifestation of their concern that their children will associate with bad or problem children and be hurt by others [16]. In addition, some parents even use psychological control, or overprotection, over their children. In detail, from a very early stage, these parents tend to satisfy their children's material and spiritual needs from the perspective of their thinking and limit their children's emotional experience and autonomy development, rather than understanding or realizing

their children's honest thoughts and needs [20]. According to the investigation, inappropriate protection or "control" will promote adolescents' more substantial demand for autonomy and independence. Moreover, if such basic psychological needs are not satisfied for long, it is easy to produce rebellious psychology and behaviour, such as adolescents' Internet addiction [20][21].

2.5. Self-actualization

Self-actualization is a person's desire for self-play and perfection, and people can fully realize the desire by consciously controlling their subjective consciousness and ability [22]. From another perspective, self-actualization needs are another form of capability needs [23]. For adolescents, the satisfaction of self-realization is equivalent to the realization of a strong desire for expression and the satisfaction and happiness obtained after achieving established goals through personal efforts and abilities [24]. In other words, self-actualization needs arise because adolescents want to determine their self-worth by getting external affirmation and appreciation of their abilities to increase their self-confidence and internal drive for life and learning. In addition, compared with children, youth care more about others' opinions of themselves, mainly when they depend on personal ability and effort a success. They especially need to get parents, teachers and peer recognition and praise, so they have enough support and motivation to continue to strive toward the future [19].

3. Discussion

Based on the above analysis, it is not difficult to see that the generation of psychological needs is related to school education (teachers), family education (parents or elders) and peer relationship (classmates and partners) to varying degrees. Problems of either party (such as the use of inappropriate teaching and guidance strategies) will have an impact on the normal development of adolescent mental health and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs; if these needs are not adequately met, it will also have an impact on the typical implementation of education. Therefore, in addition to understanding the basic psychological needs of adolescents, it is also essential for educators to effectively meet the needs to maintain the normal development of adolescents.

School is where teenagers spend the most time outside the home, and there is more time and space to provide education and support services to students. Fernandes et al. have proposed that schools should establish and maintain a positive and healthy school environment and learning atmosphere that allows students to develop an attachment and a sense of belonging to the school, thereby indirectly increasing motivation and reducing resistance or exclusion to school and learning [25]. According to the policy requirements of China's education authorities, many middle schools have developed and set up different school-based courses and community activities in recent years, which provide students with more learning choices and help them to independently decide the learning content and activities according to their interests and abilities [18]. There is also the need for sex, as mentioned above. Since puppy love has long been one of the major problems for Chinese teenagers, research on coping strategies has been paid much attention. High school biology courses and other related activities have introduced sex education about relationships and physical development to varying degrees, helping students view sexual urges more objectively and rationally [9].

Other research results show that teachers and classmates are essential sources of social support to meet the psychological needs of adolescent students [26, 27]. According to the findings, Chang et al. suggested that the concept of mindfulness should be integrated into daily teaching and support services to appropriately guide adolescents to cope with negative emotions and relieve various psychological pressures actively. Thus, promoting the satisfaction of basic psychological needs

without too much "control" or interference in the development of adolescents (i.e., giving them enough respect and space for their development) [28, 29]. Furthermore, in order to have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the development and changes of adolescents and relevant current events, teachers also have a corresponding "textbook" - Adolescent Health magazine. Many schools regard the magazine as a required book for teachers to read. Teachers are welcome to publish their teaching experience or related issues in the magazine for educators to discuss and learn together so that more people can find and understand how to effectively meet the psychological needs to promote student mental health development [10].

As for those psychological needs related to the family education, the effective starting point seems to be improving the parent-child relationship and changing the family education mode. Some experts say that schools or relevant professional institutions can provide counselling services for parents, and work with school teachers and psychological counsellors to discuss more effective implementation strategies of family education according to children's different characteristics and psychological needs [19]. By doing so, we can reduce the conflict between the two educational models and the negative impact of such conflict on teenagers and provide timely but practical support and help to children at the right time according to their different needs.

4. Conclusion

According to the above discussion, we can find that the types of psychological needs of Chinese teenagers are not very different from the common psychological needs found and summarized in western countries. At the same time, based on the strategies that have been practised to meet the basic psychological needs, we know that the satisfaction of psychological needs has more advantages than disadvantages for the healthy development of Chinese adolescents.

However, this paper only relies on past data and resources for analysis; there are still some problems or defects in the study. This paper only discusses five common psychological needs and corresponding application strategies, so it does not mean that Chinese teenagers do not have other special psychological needs. Meanwhile, in the analysis, this paper did not consider the regional differences among teenagers, different family backgrounds, distinct ethnic minority cultural backgrounds and other external influencing factors. These factors directly or indirectly affect teenagers' cognition, living habits and personal development. Also, since we did not collect the latest data, the psychological needs mentioned in this article may not apply to all teens and future young adults. These methods need to be validated in further research. In addition, it is not difficult to find that the number of studies and actual cases in China on the prevention or intervention of mental health problems or the promotion of normal mental health development from the perspective of psychological needs satisfaction are too small to verify the feasibility of all relevant views and suggestions in the context of Chinese educational environment.

Therefore, in future related research, we hope to have more professionals involved and increase the research investment in this field so that more young people can achieve better development soon because of the satisfaction of psychological needs.

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