

Analysis of Anxiety of Chinese Overseas Students under the Epidemic Situation

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Abstract: Since the outbreak of COVID-19 more than two years ago, people's health and psychology have been affected. The main manifestation of psychological influence is anxiety. The epidemic has also changed everyone's life course. In particular, the group of overseas students, who have a large number and live abroad, are most affected by the epidemic. In this paper, the author will use the questionnaire as a method of information collection to study the causes of anxiety in Chinese foreign students and how to help them alleviate this anxiety. The main focus is on the situation when the epidemic first occurred and today's situation. This paper focuses on the causes of the outbreak of the epidemic among Chinese students and the anxiety they have experienced and concludes that although the level of anxiety among international students has indeed increased due to the epidemic, this anxiety will subside as they learn more about their own problems.

Keywords: anxiety, China, international students, Covid-19, gender differences

1. Introduction

Everyone has their own worries, and worries, to a certain extent, will turn into anxiety. Students' anxiety seems to be taking a toll now during the current pandemic. Compared with before, the anxiety of students has attracted the attention of some people, but some people still don't care about it. Among them, international students have their own unique ideas and feelings because of their unique experiences. This article focuses on the anxiety of the Chinese international student community and aims to focus on every student community. Academics have always taken the issue of student mental health very seriously, but few studies in academia currently focus on Chinese students in the context of the epidemic. In the previous study by Cao et al., a questionnaire was used to investigate anxiety levels, coping strategies, psychological well-being, and social support among university students who were in China during the COVID-19 epidemic [1]. The study by Chen et al. focused on Chinese students who were in Canada during the COVID-19 epidemic. The study explored the relationship between social support, resilience, and anxiety using a questionnaire among Chinese international students studying in Canada during the COVID-19 epidemic [2]. This paper will use questionnaires as the information collection method to study the causes of anxiety of Chinese overseas students and how to help alleviate this anxiety. This paper focuses on the anxiety of Chinese international students at the beginning of the outbreak and now; and whether gender has an impact on anxiety. The paper also discusses the challenges and coping strategies faced by international students during the outbreak, including strengthening social support, adjusting psychological attitudes, and actively seeking help.

The purpose of this study is to provide a way for Chinese international students to self-understand their emotions and to provide an initial understanding of the negative emotions that can come with studying abroad for those who have not experienced it firsthand.

2. Introduction to the Epidemic and the Impact of the Epidemic

The seventh human coronavirus, the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), was identified in late December 2019 during a pneumonia epidemic in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China [3]. Statistics show that there have been 5,130,275 confirmed cases until July 29, 2022, in China overall. As of 5:33 p.m. CEST on July 29, 2022, there were 572,239,451 confirmed cases of COVID-19 worldwide, including 6,390,401 fatalities. A total of 12,248,795,623 vaccine doses have been given as of July 26, 2022 [4].

The population's mental health is also compromised by this epidemic, in addition to the physical health of those who are sick. COVID-19 is not the first full-blown outbreak in China; teenagers now entering college have already experienced SARS in 2003 and Ebola in 2014, but the higher rates of transmission and infectivity and the asymptomatic incubation period still cause great fear and concern [5]. The home quarantine implemented by the Chinese government was successful in halting the epidemic's spread, but the population suffered greatly psychologically during this time. Research and data analysis revealed that 228 of the 649 individuals quarantined had anxiety and even suicide thoughts [6]. Moderate anxiety can be beneficial for studying and working, and will subside as the anxiety is completed. However, anxiety might have negative effects if it reaches a particular point and persists throughout the day. At a time when anxiety is not taken seriously as a mental illness, it can cause people to feel scared, distressed or upset. If left untreated, anxiety disorders can make it difficult for students to complete school or study. It may also affect their relationships with peers and teachers [7]. Because it makes it harder for students to access material, process it incorrectly, and have information that is not kept or integrated in memory over time, some experts believe that excessive anxiety is a learning deficit [8].

3. Method

The author developed a questionnaire and shared it on social media based on research the author did on the anxiety experienced by Chinese students due to the outbreak. The questionnaire was distributed through social media and 243 copies were returned, with 212 valid data. The questionnaire was set up to self-assess the level of anxiety and investigate the reasons for it for the initial and current phases of the epidemic. The questions were set without including gender as one of the factors examined. Among the respondents of the 212 valid questionnaires, 167 were Chinese international students and 45 were local Chinese university students.

4. Result and Analysis

4.1. Student Anxiety and Causes at the Beginning of the Pandemic

International students, as the name implies, are students who attend school in countries other than their own. However, at the beginning of the outbreak in 2020, due to COVID-19, among the 167 international students who took the questionnaire, 124 of them could not buy tickets to their own schools and chose to stay in their home countries to attend online courses due to concerns about the epidemic; 17 of them chose to postpone their enrollment for a year; the remaining 26 were already abroad. If anxiety levels are categorized into ten levels, with 1 being the least stressful and 10 being the most anxious, then the majority of the 124 international students who remained in China at the start of the pandemic self-selected anxiety levels between 4 and 6. The 26 international students who

were already abroad had anxiety levels between 8 and 10, while those who decided to delay their enrollment for a year were scattered between levels 2 and 6. However, while the cause and location of anxiety may vary, it is important to note that few Chinese international students reported feeling anxious at all following the outbreak.

4.2. Relationship Between Anxiety and Gender

Among the international students who participated in the questionnaire, there were 95 female students and 72 male students. Among them, 17% of the female students rated their anxiety level as 6 or higher; 15% of the male students rated their anxiety level as 6 or higher. In a journal paper published in 2020 by Gao et al., researchers identified 1,892 undergraduate students from 15 Chinese universities — 898 women and 994 men — and tracked them for four years. The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 questionnaire used in the study revealed that female students in their first and second years had considerably greater anxiety ratings than male students [9]. As mentioned in the article by Hou et al., “It has been well established that women are at greater risk for psychological problems than men, because of the interactions between biological factors and social determinants, including gender stereotypes and roles, social stigma and inequity, and social autonomy.” During the COVID-19 outbreak, researchers looked into how sadness and anxiety varied by gender among Chinese social media users. They discovered that among the 3088 individuals, anxiety problems were present in 13.25 percent of cases during the COVID-19 outbreak, with women reporting more severe symptoms than males [10]. However, this situation does not exactly match that among international students. After further communication, we found that girls who are able to go out to study independently usually have an advanced psychological expectation of the situation they may encounter. This psychological expectation gives them a stronger ability to self-regulate, and this ability enables them to alleviate their own anxiety to a certain extent.

4.3. Current Student Anxiety and Causes

Next, the questionnaire carried out the survey to obtain a more precise picture of whether the anxiety state of Chinese students has altered over time and in response to the epidemic. When the international students were once more questioned about where they were at the time, it was discovered that 93% of Chinese students had finished their online coursework and were on campus in their home country. The same inquiries were made as previously, but this time, the foreign students were asked to rate their level of concern right now (level 1 being the lowest and least anxious, and level 10 being the highest and most anxious). The findings of the survey showed a more dramatic shift than before, with virtually all of the international students who took part reporting lower levels of worry to varying degrees, but none of them reporting no anxiety at all.

In the questionnaire, the reasons for Chinese international students' anxiety usually include the epidemic policy, the situation in the study abroad classroom, and going abroad alone. First off, because the news media overstated the severity of COVID-19 at the beginning of the outbreak, the majority of international students were virtually in a panic after learning they might have the disease. International students who were unable to return home were highly concerned about their health because most nations do not enforce China's home quarantine legislation. Secondly, depending on the severity of the issue, practically all international students who took part in the poll expressed nervousness about their ability to grasp and comprehend the lessons because they were flying alone to a foreign country and studying in a second or third language. Thirdly, first-time foreign students who are studying abroad worry about living alone away from their families. They worry about whether they will be able to make friends in a foreign nation and whether their ability to fully integrate into society as outsiders will be limited. Possibly to everyone's relief, the survey findings revealed

that all of these anxiety points resulting from self-initiated anxiety decreased over time, demonstrating that self-initiated worry can be self-relieved with adaptation and investigation. There are also some common causes of anxiety that apply to all people, not only for international students, such as how to manage body image, pressure from grades, conflicts in love/friendship, conflicts with family, etc.

The rest are categorized as being brought on by external factors. The first is the anxiety from friends and family. The majority of international students travel alone to study abroad, which results in a communication gap between their Chinese friends and families. Some of the things that international students do when they adjust to and become accustomed to the culture of the nation they are studying in are actually highly risky in the eyes of their families back home. One survey respondent, for instance, mentioned that his family worries about his safety when he attends school or plays in certain American locations where he is permitted to carry a gun. His family would keep in touch once with him if they found out he hadn't been home before dusk. He would become anxious over such concerns because he had no idea how to explain them to his family. The second is his fear of hiding his circumstances. In reality, practically every overseas student has classmates who have received a COVID-19 diagnosis. Sixty-seven percent of the students from different countries who answered the questionnaire said they had been diagnosed with COVID-19, but only 33% of them decided to tell their parents back home in China. As a result of their responsibility to take care of others and their uncertainty about how they could take care of themselves on their own in their diagnosed state, they admitted that they were quite anxious when they received their diagnosis. If their distant relatives and friends learned about their precarious predicament, they would be powerless to do anything but worry more. As a result, figuring out how to hide in their own discomfort causes them anxiety. Thirdly, they worry about their families' lives and are anxious about whether or not they will be a burden to their families. The option of studying abroad is no longer limited to very wealthy households. Even though their parents work long hours at home, many families today want their children to travel overseas to broaden their horizons and experience more. They think considerably more deeply than the average individual for international students from such homes. When they were studying overseas, they admitted in the questionnaire that they dared not even get sick because they were afraid they wouldn't be able to keep up with their studies and that the hefty cost of their care would burden their families more. When they become ill, they experience anxiety as a result of the self-blame, but they are unable to communicate their feelings. Their studies are impacted when their anxiety level increases over time. Fourth, given the recent deterioration of the global situation, 43 percent of the international students who responded to the survey expressed concern for their future. They are concerned that it will become increasingly difficult for them to remain in the country where they study and work, and they are unsure of what they should do next. When compared to their own thinking, these outside elements that cause anxieties are more deserving of attention.

What can international students do to calm their nerves? Despite the fact that there are now therapies for anxiety, there are a lot of complaints of anxiety in kids and teenagers every year, and "anxiety" is not taken seriously in many cases [11]. First and foremost, when anxiety symptoms are no longer limited to pure worry and begin to seriously interfere with normal life, it is important to seek professional treatment. For example, seek counseling from the school. Additionally, eating plays a crucial role in maintaining mental health because it has a direct impact on mood, stress, and anxiety. Students should routinely consume wholesome meals and pay attention to the food's ingredients. Research has repeatedly shown that people's moods are affected by what they eat [12].

5. Conclusion

The anxiety index of Chinese international students was significantly high due to COVID-19. Female students felt more anxious when facing unexpected situations compared to male students. Most of the

reasons for international students' anxiety are related to life in different countries. The anxiety of the international students themselves will be relieved as they get to know the situation personally, and it is mainly the anxiety brought by the outside world that needs to be overcome and communicated. However, if students find it difficult to overcome, they can take more care of their lives or seek advice from the school. Since the source of the data is self-assessment, there will be some errors. For further accurate analysis, some authoritative anxiety self-assessment scales will be sought for data collection.

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