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Discussion on the Current Situation and Treatment Improvement of Depression among College Students

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Abstract. The suicide rate of college students keeps rising. The mental health issues of college students have received widespread attention from society. Depression, as an important contributor to suicide among college students, still requires further research. Therefore, this paper collects data and reviews the literature to provide a detailed discussion of the causes and solutions of depression among college students. The results show that depression among college students is influenced by multiple factors such as interpersonal relationships, family support, physical health, sleep and exercise conditions, and academic and employment pressures. There are still many interactions among these factors, further increasing the difficulty of diagnosing and treating depression. Existing research shows that measures such as regular exercise, improving sleep quality, strengthening family and school support, conducting early screening and cognitive behavioural intervention can help prevent or alleviate depression among college students. Medication should be administered under the assessment and professional guidance of doctors. Overall, the prevention and treatment of depression among college students require the joint participation of students, families, universities and the medical support system to establish a comprehensive and continuous intervention mechanism. Depression caused by interpersonal relationships, physiological factors and academic factors can be prevented, alleviated and treated through exercise, sleep, teacher intervention, family education, self-regulation and medication. Society should pay attention to the phenomenon of depression among college students and provide comprehensive resources and support as assistance.

Keywords: Depression, college students, mental health

1. Introduction

Depression is a relatively serious mood disorder that often presents with a depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure in life, various physical symptoms such as fatigue, sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, difficulty concentrating, feelings of worthlessness, and suicidal ideation [1]. There may be an imbalance in the neurotransmitters of the brain, disruption of the function of related brain areas such as the prefrontal cortex and hippocampus, and a reduction in a person's attention and memory. This is shown by a prolonged sense of hopelessness and depression, as well as a loss of interest in life and hobbies. Depression is generally the result of a prolonged depressed state, which includes persistent low mood, a reduced speed of thought, a loss of interest in all things, and even disgust.

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The above negative emotions will change the person's mood, thinking and behaviour. Depression is now one of the main reasons for death among college students. Therefore, there will be a decline in the efficiency of learning, and it will also interfere with the work and life of patients and their families, potentially causing serious harm to life in severe cases. Depression is a severe problem for college students, and many of them have been diagnosed. Therefore, teachers, classmates, parents and students need to be aware of depression, detect it early through all kinds of means, and intervene by providing psychological counseling, improving sleep, reducing external pressure and regulating one's own mind to prevent students from developing autism, self-harm or even suicide. At present, the proportion of college students experiencing depression is increasing, and the prevalence rate of depression has reached 22.3%. The proportions of extremely mild, mild, moderate, moderate to severe, and severe depression are 15.9%, 32.4%, 29.5%, 14.7%, and 7.6%, respectively [1].

Research on depression is needed to ensure the health of college students' study and life. Based on the literature review in this paper, several factors are believed to cause depression among college students; therefore, some preventive measures have been proposed, including peer interaction, teacher guidance, family education, self-management, medication, and other feasible solutions to reduce depression symptoms.

2. Introduction to core concepts

As a special group of young adults, college students are in a crucial stage of life development. Whether freshmen can adapt to college life and study, whether senior students can smoothly achieve their future life plans, and whether they handle interpersonal relationships well will all have a significant impact on the emotions of college students. If maladaptive adjustments are made, it can lead to depressive symptoms, depressive episodes, and even behaviours that endanger life safety such as suicide and homicide [2].

In terms of relationships with others, people need to establish connections to satisfy their basic psychological needs, such as a sense of belonging, self-esteem, a feeling of control and a sense of purpose in life. Good social relationships and happiness can make people feel good and satisfy their needs for information sharing, emotional support and socialisation. However, if students are unable to form relationships or have been rejected by others, they may experience various negative psychological effects, such as reduced self-esteem, a loss of control, and a sense of meaninglessness in life. This may lead to a state of chronic anxiety and unmet psychological needs for the students, thus increasing their risk of depression. Therefore, good relationships with others can help people feel better mentally, and if they do not get along with someone, it may make people feel depressed. The origins of stress for college students are varied and interconnected. According to the published reports, mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (including depressive and anxious states) among college students are often comorbid; that is to say, one condition is frequently associated with an increased risk of developing the other over time [1]. Depression can harm all parts of the brain, and thus is linked to a higher risk of dementia, cardiovascular disease, stroke and a reduced quality of life [3].

3. The relationship between interpersonal relationships and depression in college students

3.1. Interpersonal relationships among college students

In terms of relationships with others, people need to form close ties with others in order to satisfy their basic psychological needs for a sense of belonging, self-worth, control and a sense of purpose.

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Good socialisation and positive relationships make people feel good and help them achieve their goals by spreading information, expressing emotions, and maintaining relationships. However, when the formation of interpersonal relationships fails or is met with rejection, a series of negative psychological problems may occur, such as reduced self-esteem, a sense of powerlessness, and a loss of purpose in life. This will cause the students to be in a state of chronic anxiety and demand for deprivation, thus increasing their risk of depression [4]. Therefore, a good relationship can help people face the difficulties in life; otherwise, they may be more prone to depression.

Interpersonal adaptation problems refer to the psychological phenomenon of an inability to form and maintain healthy relationships with others, and are one of the main sources of psychological stress for college students [5]. Students need to join some groups for university life. If the students live in a dormitory, the pressure of living in a group will be relatively high. Introverted students have difficulty integrating with the other students in the dormitory. The dormitory has a large number of people and is relatively cramped. Members of the dormitory form cliques and are isolated. Some students do not have a sense of boundaries and are unable to respect others' privacy; as a result, serious conflicts have occurred over different opinions. If students in the dormitory form small groups to exclude or even bully other students, it will undoubtedly greatly affect their mentality. The formation of such groups is often directly related to personality, ethnicity, economic level and common interests and hobbies; thus, there is little conflict and only a desire for commonality, ignoring differences. Choosing to live off-campus instead of in the dormitory will make it harder to get along with the others because there will be less time together. All of the above will increase the students' stress.

The comparison among students can also expose the uneven economic conditions, and when individuals feel that they are in a disadvantaged position that cannot be changed in the short term, it may lead to anxiety and depression. The comparison here may be material or spiritual. On the material level, factors such as clothing, electronic devices, and outdoor activities, as well as some in-game items, require time and money to obtain, which will also squeeze students' time and financial budgets. On the spiritual level, in terms of intimate relationships, whether they are in a romantic relationship, the degree of relationship stability, and comparisons between peers may all affect students' self-evaluation and, in some cases, trigger anxiety, jealousy, or feelings of loss. Of course, conflicts and breakups in romantic relationships can greatly increase the likelihood of depression.

3.2. The influence of family on college students

Research shows that there is a positive correlation between family care and the level of interpersonal trust among college students. When facing changes in the environment, the family is the source of emotional support and security for college students. Previous studies have shown that the level of care and importance that family members place on each other directly affects adolescents' sense of interpersonal alienation. A higher level of family care helps to form a positive self-concept and outlook on others, enhancing their predetermined trust baseline in social interactions; On the contrary, long-term lack of family support may make students more prone to feelings of insecurity and interpersonal defense, reduce their level of interpersonal trust, and thus affect their social adaptation ability and mental health status [6].

4. The influence of physiological factors on college students

Physiological factors can also affect the depression status of college students. The core mechanism lies in the imbalance of neurotransmitters in the brain, especially low levels of serotonin, which are

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closely related to depressive symptoms. Meanwhile, depression often accompanies dysfunction of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, leading to disturbances in the body's stress response system [7]. In addition, depression can also affect the structure and function of the brain, especially in areas such as the prefrontal cortex and hippocampus, leading to cognitive decline. Other physiological factors such as abnormal gut microbiota structure, disrupted metabolic pathways, and genetic susceptibility have also been shown to be associated with the occurrence of depression [8].

On the other hand, depression may exacerbate physiological dysfunction and trigger a series of physical symptoms. Depression can lead to persistent physical discomfort such as fatigue, lack of energy, sleep disorders, and loss of appetite. These symptoms not only seriously affect the patient's ability to perform daily activities, but may also trigger a lack of physical activity and sedentary behaviour, thereby increasing the risk of physical illnesses such as obesity and cardiovascular disease, forming a vicious cycle. The study also found that patients with depression have multiple metabolic pathway disorders, further indicating that depression has a widespread negative impact on the physiological and metabolic processes of the whole body [8].

4.1. The relationship between sleep and depression in college students

Currently, poor sleep quality is one of the strongest predictors of potential depression in the future. Most (90%) patients who experience depression report poor sleep quality, and some (40%) patients with severe depression may also experience insomnia symptoms such as difficulty falling asleep, maintaining sleep, and waking up early [3].

Sleep can affect students' mental state, and insufficient sleep may significantly increase the risk of depression. When students use electronic devices for a long time or excessively play online games, they are prone to problems such as late nights, disrupted circadian rhythms, and insufficient sleep duration. This may lead to sleep deprivation. Students who sleep at different times at night will also influence each other, and eventually find it difficult to fall asleep.

4.2. The relationship between exercise and depression in college students

Exercise time may also be reduced by competing academic and recreational activities. In recent years, due to the influence of the social environment and negative thinking, the incidence of depression among Chinese college students has significantly increased. At the same time, students' lack of physical activity leads to obesity and sedentary behaviour, which also increases the incidence rate of depression. Patients with depression often exhibit a lack of energy, decreased motivation, and reduced interest. Even if they understand that exercise may help improve their mood, they may find it difficult to persist in the long term due to difficulties in initiating action, lack of companionship, and a lack of reasonable exercise plans [8].

4.3. The relationship between other physiological factors and depression in college students

Hygiene issues in dormitories can affect students' health status. Poor hygiene conditions in dormitory environments can make students' physiological conditions more fragile. Being addicted to games can also deprive students of exercise and sleep time, and poor physical condition can greatly affect their psychological state. Moreover, students with a history of mental illness and trauma, as well as those with personal chronic illnesses, have a higher prevalence of depression compared to others [1].

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In addition, other behaviours that may harm health, such as smoking, alcohol abuse, unhealthy diets, and poor hygiene conditions, indirectly increase the risk of depression. When students want to save money for various reasons, the easiest part to compress the budget is to reduce food expenses. Some students may reduce their normal dietary expenses and rely on convenience foods or foods with low nutrition or a single nutritional structure for a long time, which can affect their physical health and emotional stability.

5. The relationship between academic performance and depression among college students

5.1. The issue of professional choice

Dissatisfaction with students' majors is a common problem among college students in the learning process. One of the reasons is that students lack sufficient understanding of the professional content, learning requirements, and future development directions after graduating from high school. Many students are easily confused when faced with a large number of major choices, and the learning content, intensity, and future development path of the major often lack sufficient and intuitive information presentation. Parents and teachers of students can only provide limited advice within their understanding. Of course, some children have found suitable majors based on their past experiences or reference to their parents' jobs, but they still need a certain score to apply for relevant schools. The competition between different schools is fierce, and the ranking of schools is not completely linked to the industry level of their majors. The above factors may lead to students discovering a significant gap between their real-life experiences and their original expectations after enrollment, resulting in disappointment, self-doubt, and difficulty adapting to their studies, ultimately increasing the risk of depression. When students believe that the development prospects of their major are limited or the employment returns are insufficient, they may reduce their learning motivation and worry about future financial and employment pressures. Students may experience anxiety and despair due to the difficulty of finding a job or low salary in their major, as well as regret for choosing this major in the first place. Plenty of schools provide opportunities to transfer majors during the first and second year of college, but this is also influenced by the distribution of student sources and faculty, as well as students' perceptions of their majors and themselves. These factors can lead to issues such as "why did not I apply when I had the opportunity to transfer majors again" and "the school did not approve my transfer application".

5.2. Daily learning issues

After entering college, students often live in dormitories and obtain their own computers. With the sudden reduction of pressure after the college entrance examination and the lack of self-management and external supervision, some students may become overly addicted to electronic entertainment, greatly reducing their energy and time invested in learning. At the same time, if the learning content is not very suitable for students or is relatively difficult, it will exacerbate the phenomenon of academic neglect. Students know that they should not be addicted to computers and not study, but the design concept of games is to attract players and provide emotional value. By setting a series of short-term goals, players can gain a sense of achievement and satisfaction. In reality, learning is difficult, and this sense of achievement and satisfaction is neither obvious nor easy to obtain, and the cycle is relatively long (half a semester or a semester). Therefore, playing games may become one way to escape real-life pressure. When students approach the deadline for exams or assignments, psychological pressure may continue to rise, and avoidance behaviour will further delay task

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completion, forming a negative cycle of "increased pressure - avoidance of reality - worse results", and gradually damaging the psychological state. Even if the homework is completed smoothly or the exam is passed, the score will not be very high, and guilt and family blame are also sources of psychological pressure.

6. Discussion and suggestion

6.1. Exercise

In recent years, the concept of integrating sports and medicine has gradually emerged. In the context of universities, the integration of sports and medicine can provide personalised, phased, and supervised exercise programs for students with depressive symptoms through the collaboration of school hospitals, psychological counselling centres, and physical education courses. Not only can it enhance physical fitness and delay disease progression, but it can also improve emotional states through physiological and psychological pathways, promote more proactive coping strategies, improve adaptability to stress, enhance self-efficacy, and thus improve mental health. This concept emphasises the interaction between body and mind. Exercise intervention can have an impact through neurotransmitters such as serotonin and the hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis, and these physiological changes may help alleviate stressful experiences and negative emotions [7].

6.2. Sleep

According to research, students with poor sleep quality are approximately 7 times more likely to suffer from depression than those with good sleep quality. If students sleep less than or more than the optimal sleep time of 7 to 8 hours, they are more likely to suffer from depression [3]. Therefore, ensuring sufficient and regular sleep is of great significance for maintaining the physical and mental health of college students.

6.3. Teacher intervention

Psychological counselling centres have been widely established in universities to address students' depression issues, accompanied by a certain number of psychological teachers. Psychology-related courses are also offered to help college students reduce the risk and burden of depression. But the number of college students in school is often hundreds of times more than that of psychological teachers, and it is difficult for psychological teachers to cover all students. If intervention is only carried out after students show obvious depressive symptoms, it often misses the critical stage of early support. Therefore, universities need to establish a more proactive mechanism for identifying psychological risks. When students show signs of depression, if counsellors, homeroom teachers, and psychological counsellors can intervene in a timely manner when students experience early signals such as sustained low mood, social withdrawal, or decreased learning function, it can help reduce the risk of further development of psychological crises. The school psychological centre can regularly use various depression evaluation scales, online communication and feedback platforms, and counsellors can conduct early warning screening of depression through regular visits to dormitories [9]. Cognitive behavioural therapy can effectively alleviate depression among college students, helping them adjust unreasonable cognition and problem-solving methods, and apply the methods learned during the treatment process to their daily lives [10].

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6.4. Family atmosphere

The level of family care for college students should be maintained at a relatively high level, and regular mental health education should be provided by relevant parties to improve the level of family care. Communication skills and effective conflict resolution methods should be taught to college students and their family members to enhance their perceived level of family care and thus improve their interpersonal trust; For families requiring additional support, various resources should be utilized to provide timely professional assistance and psychological counseling, gradually improve their family care level, establish a more harmonious family environment, enhance students' social support perception ability, and promote the formation of positive social support cognitive patterns; For college students, universities can carry out interpersonal trust education through mental health courses, dormitory relationship workshops, group counseling, and peer support activities to enhance students' ability to communicate, cooperate, and share with others. Improving the level of interpersonal trust among college students can help them establish good interpersonal relationships and provide assistance in solving various problems [6].

6.5. Self-regulation and medication regulation

Students should develop effective communication skills to avoid unnecessary conflicts caused by misunderstandings, suspicions, and other issues. Especially when facing disagreements or disputes, it is important to learn to express oneself rationally and listen to others' viewpoints. Students should take the initiative to communicate with their roommates, understand each other's interests, hobbies and living habits, and reduce the discomfort and conflicts caused by lack of understanding. Respect the diversity of roommates, including gender, cultural background, living habits, etc., and respect personal privacy. Strengthen self-discipline and avoid disturbing others, such as keeping quiet in the dormitory, avoiding unnecessary noise, and paying attention to the cleanliness of public areas. During the accommodation process, if conflicts arise, students should communicate with their roommates in a timely manner and try to find a common solution. Students should cultivate team spirit and collective awareness by helping their roommates in daily life [11].

Although about one-third of students are unaware of the onset and duration of antidepressant medication, almost half of students believe that antidepressants may lead to dependence and should be discontinued gradually under medical guidance. Some students may be exposed to antidepressants due to social anxiety, depressive symptoms, academic burden, or attention needs, but medication use must be based on professional diagnosis and medical guidance, and antidepressants should not be taken indiscriminately. Most students need education on the nature of mental illness, how to cope, and the appropriate use of psychotropic drugs when needed. A promotional campaign should be launched to reduce the abuse of psychoactive substances by students [12].

7. Conclusion

In contemporary society, multiple factors may contribute to depression among college students. The low willingness to communicate and low motivation of depression patients make it very difficult to prevent, detect, and treat depression. Psychotropic drugs may cause dependence and should be avoided as much as possible. Various physiological and psychological methods should be prioritised to improve depression. At the same time, schools should place greater emphasis on students' mental health and reduce their burden. The government should also increase guidance on students' mental health and strengthen supervision of the construction of school psychological centres. The mental

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health of college students is not only related to personal growth and academic completion, but also to family happiness, campus safety, and social development. Therefore, it requires the joint participation of schools, families, students themselves, and social support systems to form a sustained, comprehensive, and operable mechanism for depression prevention and intervention.

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