

Countermeasures of School Social Workers' Intervention in the Prevention and Treatment of Adolescent Depression

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Abstract

Depression is one of the most difficult problems in adolescent physical and mental health. At present, there are more than 50 million people suffering from depression in China, among which adolescents account for 20 percent. In recent years, the harm of depression to adolescents has become more and more serious, which is specifically reflected in the following aspects: the number of adolescents suffering from depression is increasing year by year, the average age of adolescent depression patients is declining, and the number of undiagnosed but depressed adolescents has increased significantly. School social workers have unique advantages in students' mental health. They can help students establish good values and self-cognition through resource links and positive psychological guidance.

Keywords

School social worker; Adolescents; Depression.

1. Current Research

1.1. Background Research

Depression is one of the most difficult problems in adolescent physical and mental health. Compared with adult depression, adolescent depression is characteristic of concealment, stage development and susceptibility, which leads to the result that adolescent depression is difficult to be prevented, and adolescent depression patients are difficult to be identified, diagnosed, and treated in a timely manner [1]. At present, there are more than 50 million people suffering from depression in China, accounting for nearly 4% of the country's total population [2]. Among them, the incidence of depression in adolescents is as high as 20% [3]. According to the Report on China's Youth Development released by the China Youth & Children Research Center and the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of China (CYLC Central Committee), 30 million young people in China have suffered from varying degrees of psychological distress or mood disorders, with up to 30 percent of them saying they have been afflicted with depressive symptoms. Therefore, we must be clearly aware that the physical and mental health of Chinese adolescents is being threatened by depression: the number of adolescents suffering from depression is increasing year by year; the average age of those affected is falling; the number of adolescents with undiagnosed depression has increased dramatically and the situation is getting worse.

1.2. Schools and Depression

Depression in the schoolyard and on campus deserves our attention. For most people, school is about knowledge, companionship, and growth, the things that are necessary in the process of socialization. The school is not only an ordinary place for education, but also a place where individuals grow and interact with other members of society. Unfortunately, for a variety of

reasons, this petri dish, once thought of as pure and sterile, has also begun to breed depression. On July 24, 2019, China Youth Daily launched a survey on college students' depression on Weibo. More than 300,000 college students responded to the survey and among them more than 20 percent believe they are seriously depressed. Students at school are going through adolescence and early adulthood, and their self-cognition, values and identity are being shaped. So, they are easily to be affected by the external environment and the people and events in the environment. Therefore, if the problem of depression in schools is not taken seriously and prevented early, its adverse effects are likely to gradually expand.

1.3. The Harm of Depression at School

Depression can be more harmful to adolescents than other groups of people, especially in school settings. For adults, the harm of depression is mainly reflected in the loss of personal interest in life, work and other aspects, depression, accompanied by mental fatigue, manic depression, slow reaction, and harm to one's social function, interpersonal relations and personal health. For depression patients in the schoolyard, they will not only suffer from the above symptoms, but the harm may be aggravated by their low self-cognition or lack of life experience. One of the symptoms of depression is repeated thoughts of suicide, attempts to commit suicide or a definite plan to do so. For the depressed student in school, because they do not have the mature mind, or are in the emotional turmoil of adolescence, are more likely to take the impulse to commit suicide.

1.4. Analysis of the Causes of Depression Among School Students

The inducing factors of adolescent depression are very complex and affected by many factors. Scientific research has proved that depression, as a mental illness, is closely related to genetic factors, but it is far from enough to consider adolescent depression only from genetic factors. In addition to genetic factors, the high incidence of depression in the student population is also related to factors such as family, interpersonal relationship, stress, illness, traumatic experience. Among them, the most far-reaching and harmful pathogenic factor for children is the harsh environment of their family of origin [4]. The family of origin is the most important living place for adolescents, and it also has the most obvious role in shaping their character and thoughts. Fierce family conflicts, poor living conditions, and even physical and mental abuse will set a gloomy tone for the growth of children, and plant in the depths of their minds the idea that "even close relationships are dangerous". This deep-rooted idea will have a long-term impact on children's social interactions and interpersonal relationships in the future [5]. In addition, in the process of character formation, the lack of love in the family of origin will cause the character defects of children, making them lack of recognition, pursuit and maintenance of love and beauty. They are more likely to lack the concept of equality, harmony and mutual love in their growth process. Children who grow up in this environment tend to be lonely in school. In the face of adversity, these adolescents tend to keep their pain to themselves. Once they are faced with school violence, bad interpersonal relationship, academic problems and other stressful situations, their last line of defense in their mind will be completely broken down, they will fall into the abyss of depression.

In recent years, frequent incidents of campus violence have made people gradually realize that the interpersonal relationship at school is not as clear and simple as people have imagined. As adolescents, they are already curious about new things, and friendship, community, and communication are easy to arouse their interest in exploration. But in adolescence, the way of dealing with interpersonal relationship of adolescents is extremely simplistic and childish. This lack of inclusive interpersonal relationship model is more likely to produce antagonism and exclusion, which is why school violence incidents are common. For the victims, school violence is undoubtedly painful and unbearable. At present, China's education system and social culture are trying to create a sunny and hopeful environment for young people to grow up in. However,

the sudden attack of school violence has caused children to form a strong sense of conflict and self-doubt between the sad reality and the sunny and positive growing up environment. This feeling of antagonism is more likely to lead individuals into continuous pain and depression, which is the cause of adolescent depression.

In view of China's education system and reality, there is another factor that must be paid attention to which causes depression of students, that is, academic pressure. For Chinese students, academic performance has always been a hard indicator of their personal growth and overall quality. Even many undergraduates and post-graduate students who have already passed the threshold of higher education have to face the pressures from pursuing further education, scientific research, graduation and so on. It is no exaggeration to say that academic pressure is a long-term and heavy burden for students who have not joined the workforce yet. Such mental stress is an inducing factor for depression, especially for students facing entrance examinations, the psychological pressure they endure is heavy and unbearable. Therefore, the incidence of depression is significantly high in adolescents [6].

In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, puppy love, illness, traumatic experiences (such as sexual assault), teachers' misconduct, maladjustment to the environment and other reasons can also contribute to the onset of depression. However, it should be noted that adolescents' suffering from depression is often the result of the combined effect and pressure of multiple reasons mentioned above. Therefore, depression in the student population has complex pathogenic causes, and the method of specific analysis of specific problems should be adopted in the response and treatment process.

2. School Social Workers' Involvement in Depression

2.1. The Need for School Social Workers to Intervene in Campus Depression

At present, there are only relatively simple measures for the prevention and treatment of depression in primary, middle and high schools at all levels in China, which are lagging behind social development, so they only have poor effect in prevention and treatment. It can be seen that the intervention of school social workers is quite necessary in the prevention and treatment of adolescent depression.

In terms of prevention, schools at all levels in China have established a depression prevention system by opening various psychological courses and lectures, holding themed activities, and making in place timely monitoring and intervention by teachers and counselors. However, there are many loopholes and deficiencies in this prevention system [7]. On the one hand, although psychological courses, psychological lectures and theme activities have been carried out for many times, they have only achieved very little effect. In most cases, the primary purpose of these themed activities is to complete the tasks, and they have the common problems of rough organization and low quality. Therefore, these activities not only fail to help students build up a psychological prevention system during the short school time, but also take up their spare time and increase their burden of schoolwork. On the other hand, affected by the current entrance system, psychology courses in schools are generally only offered in lower grades. However, according to the survey, depression patients at school are more concentrated in the graduating class, which is closely related to the academic pressure mentioned above. Therefore, the current psychology courses at schools do not really cover the potential patients, thus unable to play a timely and effective role in the prevention of depression. From the perspective of treatment, in school mental health service-parent-teacher-peer group, the social support system of the student group, adolescents with depression are most inclined to seek help from peer groups, and psychological counseling, seemingly the most authoritative and scientific method, is often placed as the last choice when the patient seeks help. This phenomenon is not only due to the young people's low awareness of psychological counseling

and school mental health services, but also due to the distance between the role of psychological teachers and adolescents. In this context, the campus psychotherapy system cannot timely intervene in the early stage of students' depression, making them miss the golden period of treatment. In the follow-up stage of interventional treatment, because of the gap between the roles of psychological teachers and students, it is difficult for the latter to open their hearts to the former, and thus the treatment effect cannot be guaranteed.

From this point of view, the traditional schoolyard psychological prevention and treatment system is not ideal in either prevention or treatment in terms of its role in the early warning, intervention, and timely treatment of depression. School social workers have unique advantages in student work. It can build a sound and interactive channel among students, parents and teachers, and help students establish correct values and rebuild their self-cognition by means of resource links and positive psychological guidance. Therefore, it is an indispensable new growth driver to solve the problem of depression of students [8].

2.2. The Feasibility and Positive Significance of School Social Workers in Coping with Depression

According to the Guideline on Strengthening Mental Health Services jointly issued in 2016 by 22 ministries and commissions, including the National Health and Family Planning Commission and the Ministry of Education, China will continue to increase financial input in mental health services for adolescents. Because of their unique advantages and irreplaceable place in the prevention and treatment of depression, school social workers have become an important indicator for measuring the construction of grass-roots level psychological services in the Guideline.

School social workers are confidants of students and teachers, as well as instructors, communicators and linkers in student-related work [9]. They have the functions of establishing benign communication, coordinating forces from all sides, guiding positive changes, and linking and integrating resources. Therefore, school social workers enjoy an incomparable role in the scientific prevention, alleviation and treatment, as well as the emergency response of depression.

School social workers can cooperate with school psychological teachers to carry out targeted theme education courses and publicity and education activities according to the characteristics of school students of different ages, so as to cover a wide range of student groups at the prevention level. Depression is the crux of the accumulation and solidification of the negative psychological state caused by the induced events over a long period of time. For student groups, depression is often associated with dramatic changes in people and things in the surroundings. These changes cause mood swings among students. But, such emotional changes are not diseases that immediately come on and affect people, but a silent and delayed process that gradually eats away at individuals [10]. As a result, parents and teachers of many student patients can't even detect subtle changes in children, which delays the best time for intervention. In many cases, parents and teachers do not take it seriously until the child's symptoms become apparent. Different from the traditional school mental health services, school social workers can aim at the onset and characteristics of depression, make up for the possible omissions in school mental health services and family life, and thus maximize the role of prevention.

The treatment of depression requires a combination of medication and psychotherapy. However, these two treatment methods cannot be properly implemented by relying on the strength of students alone, and professional psychological doctors are also needed to carry out clinical diagnosis and treatment for students. On the basis of early identification of patients with depression and initial counseling, social workers in school are able to establish a communication bridge between adolescents, parents and psychologists as soon as possible. In

addition, school social workers can act as resource linkers, providing information about drug treatment, medical insurance, social security policies, etc., and connecting resources provided by social support systems such as communities and foundations to help patients' families deal with the burden of drug treatment. Meanwhile, the school social workers may play a good psychological auxiliary effect, and can play an appropriate role in the pre-illness relief of depressed students. Moreover, social workers in school can also help with the implementation of the treatment plan of the psychologists, provide real-time feedback based how well the plan is implemented, make timely adjustment and guidance, and maximize the treatment effect.

Compared with adults, school children have poor emotional control ability, and are more likely to produce intense emotional reactions due to temporary stimulation. This is especially true for students with depression. They are more likely to act out of control and go to extremes because of some subtle external stimuli. To avoid such a situation, the school social workers can timely carry out case analysis and group activities. Together with emergency response measures, they can effectively prevent the situation from becoming serious, play the role of emergency protection, and avoid tragedies.

3. Pathways of School Social Worker Intervention for Student Depression

3.1. Offering Special Courses on Mental Health

For most primary and secondary schools in China, mental health curriculum has long been a permanent curriculum and has played a positive role in teaching practice for many years. In addition, in view of the tight class schedule of high schools and colleges, most schools and universities have set up psychological counseling rooms which are equipped with professional psychological teachers to give regular lectures on mental health.

On this basis, the school social workers can cooperate with the psychological teachers of the school or relevant departments to offer classes on mental health on irregular basis. For example, in autumn and winter, when seasonal depression is at its peak, social workers in the school can give lectures and courses on depression. In the graduation season every year, some students in colleges and universities face the pressure of and difficulties in graduation, employment and further study. Therefore, social workers in colleges and universities can carry out targeted and supportive special courses based on the specific situation. It is imperative to form a positive complementarity and linkage between the special courses and the regular courses on mental health, and to safeguard the adolescent mental health in an all-round way.

3.2. Conducting One-on-one Counseling

School social workers can play the role of confidants, providing students with one-on-one psychological counseling at school and on campus, understanding the specific conditions that cause the disease, and carrying out analysis according to specific problems. Depression needs long-term treatment. To prevent, manage and treat depression properly, multiple support systems, such as adolescents and families, need to work together. Therefore, it is highly necessary to carry out one-to-one psychological counseling for students suffering from depression. Many adolescents are unaware that they are depressed, but their families, classmates, and teachers often see dramatic changes in their behavior. In this case, as long as those who are close to them communicate with the school social workers and seek their help, they have the opportunity to help the social workers stop the trend of depression from worsening quickly. For students with complicated family situations or those from left-behind children, school social workers can provide one-on-one counseling to better link resources from the community, social welfare and social institutions.

3.3. Conducting Group Activities

By carrying out group activities for depressed adolescents, school social workers can make full use of the supporting role of peer groups to help group members grow together in the activities and realize positive changes in psychological cognition. In the process of group activities, students with depression can better express themselves and rebuild their self-confidence; the interaction with group members can exercise their interpersonal skills and help them acquire a positive and healthy communication mode; group members can form a support network among each other to achieve mutual help.

3.4. Home-school-community Linkage

School social workers should play the role of communicator and linker, and build a home-school-community mental health linkage system. School social workers can help adolescents connect with various links in the system to get support for the specific problems they face. At the same time, school social workers can link the resources depressed students lack according to their own specific conditions, and integrate the strength of various players in the system to form a positive force in the treatment link.

3.5. Online Counselling

School social workers can offer online counselling through the school's Wechat official account, website and microblog, which can better help students who are shy to express themselves to receive preliminary screening and guidance. In addition, effective online counseling and guidance can also help adolescents under heavy schoolwork pressure make effective use of psychological counseling time.

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