



Factors and Interventions in Youth Depression and Anxiety: An In-Depth Analysis within Chinese Context

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Abstract. This study critically analyzes the potential factors lead to anxiety and depression among youth based on the theoretical framework of Ecological Systems Theory (EST) and Dweck's mindset theory within a Chinese context. Study result indicated that external factors, including high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, collectivism and negative parenting styles may increase the risks of suffering from anxiety and depression. Moreover, internal factors, particularly refers to a fixed mindset, can cause these mental problems. This study proposes the appropriate strategies and interventions at the school, family and individual levels to reduce anxiety and depression among youth. It highlighted the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive environment to promote positive mental health among Chinese youth. Furthermore, it emphasizes the necessity for individuals to collaborate with parents, teachers, and mental health professionals in addressing and managing mental health issues effectively.

Keywords: Depression; Anxiety; Cultural Orientations; Parenting Style; Mindsets

1 Introduction

Researchers reported that the risk of suffering from depression and anxiety are ongoing rising, particularly in China and various other Asian countries, prompting the adoption of appropriate interventions [1][2]. These two mental illness affects the 14% of individuals aged 10-19, contributing to 13% of the overall disease burden in this age group [3]. Depression and anxiety may bring unstable emotions, low self-efficacy and even lead to suicide [4]. World Health Organization also highlighted that mental illnesses in youth can impair both physical and mental health throughout their lives [3].

Given that current epidemic of depression and anxiety is unprecedented and negative consequences that may bring among young people, it is worthwhile to explore the potential factors lead to anxiety and depression. Despite previous research has investigated the potential reasons cause these mental problems, such as genetics, childhood trauma and environmental factors, limited research examines the influence of cultural heterogeneity and internal cognition in a Chinese context [4][5]. Cultural factors can impact social and individual's mindsets, cognition and behaviors [6]. Moreover, school

education and parenting styles are also important for youth development. Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of cultural orientations, school education and parenting style (external factors) based on the Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (EST) [7]. Cultural orientations have been explored based on Hofstede's cultural orientation theory [8]. In addition, the impact of individual's cognition and mindset (internal factors) on anxiety and depression have been discussed based on Dweck's theory of mindset in a Chinese context [9]. Furthermore, this study highlighted that anxiety and depression can be reduced through appropriate strategies such as professional psychological intervention, family and school support. This paper attempts to analyze the concept of anxiety and depression first, and then elucidate the theoretical framework. External and internal factors lead to anxiety and depression will be discussed subsequently. Finally, appropriate strategies and interventions will be highlighted.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Anxiety and Depression

Anxiety is one of the mental problems, refers to the emotional state that is accompanied by the sense of nervous and restless, and experiencing a sense of fear, and physiological reactions like rapid breathing [10]. Depression is typically characterized by a continuous low mood or sadness, difficulty falling asleep, and experiencing some type of somatic symptom disorder [10].

Despite the manifestation of anxiety and depression is different to some extent, they usually demonstrate similar and overlapping symptoms, such as rapid breathing, which has adverse effects on mental or physical development. Research indicate that anxiety and depression can be treated by cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) [11]. In order to improve the effectiveness of related interventions and strategies, it is necessary to investigate the potential factors that lead to anxiety and depression among young people.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory (EST) was first presented by Bronfenbrenner in 1979. EST emphasizes the impact of the environment on the individual and the interrelated nature of contexts, providing a framework for understanding human development [7]. EST consists of five systems: the microsystem (e.g., school, family), mesosystem (e.g., relationships between family and school), exosystem (e.g., local government, extended family), macrosystem (e.g., culture), and chronosystem (e.g., time).

The microsystem comprises the direct environments in which the individual lives, including parents, school, and peers that affect the individual [7]. The mesosystem refers to the interactions between different microsystems, such as the relationship between school and family[7]. The exosystem includes elements that the individual is not directly involved in, such as parents' friends and extended family [7]. The macrosystem

consists of cultural and societal structures that influence not only the individual but also the entire society [7].

2.3 Potential Factors Lead to Anxiety and Depression

2.3.1 Macro Level: Cultural Orientations

Culture may affect an individual's anxiety and depression. The current study aims to examine the Chinese cultural orientations based on the Hofstede's cultural orientation theory [8]. According to research, the Chinese cultural orientation has been identified as collectivism, high power distance, and high uncertain avoidance [12][13]. Power distance refers to the power hierarchy and acceptance of inequality within a society [8]. A society with the higher power distance, the larger of the power gap between different classes of people, which means they are more likely to accept the inequality [8]. Previous studies have found that China has a higher power distance compared with Western countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom [12][13][14].

Young people in high power distance school contexts are more prone to suffer from anxiety and depression. High power distance lead to the unequal authority between teachers and students. For example, in traditional Chinese schools, students often have little or no authority to express their personal opinions, and their demands regarding studies usually be ignored. It is because the mainstream school education is teacher-centered approach with minimal student interaction. Students' opinions and learning needs are often not been taken seriously and may even be ignored, which may decrease their self-confidence. This can further lead to low self-efficacy, making students more vulnerable to anxiety and depression [15]. Researchers also supported that people with lower self-efficacy are more prone to suffer mental health problems [16].

Moreover, Chinese society is primarily orientated by Confucian ideology and collectivism [17]. Confucianism emphasizes virtues such as studiousness, loyalty, and filial piety [17]. Thus, Chinese parents and students are rather value the importance of learning. They consider learning plays a critical role in an individual's holistic development, as high academic achievement means students are more likely to access better university and find decent job. It can bring their "face" in the society. Moreover, collectivism lead to Chinese students prioritize family or group interest instead of their own interest. Thus, the motivation of study are mainly attributed to meet parent's expectations and family honor. When students' learning motivation is driven predominantly by external factors rather than internal motivation, they are more likely to experience unhealthy stress, increasing the risk of anxiety and depression [18]. By contrast, if students' learning purpose is from their inner motivation, appropriate and healthy pressure may benefit to their achievement, and less likely to suffer anxiety and depression [18]. Thus, collectivism cultural orientation may cause the mental illness to some extent.

In addition, high uncertain avoidance may also lead to anxiety and depression. Uncertain avoidance refers to the extent to accept the uncertain and vague things [18]. High uncertain avoidance means the individuals are less likely to bear the uncertain things happen. Take Chinese mainstream school as an example, school principals or leaders tend to implement strict regulations to prevent any uncertain accidents happens

among students. Particularly for dress, excessive intimacy between male and female students, and teenage love. In order to avoid this, schools may prohibit female students from having long or dyed hair, and even forbidding opposite genders communication and from sitting together during lunch. These rules aim to prevent relationships that could lead to serious consequences such as unprotected sexual behavior. However, this cannot solve the problem fundamentally, and even aggravate the consequence. Under-age students' pregnancy may experience peer isolation, marginalization and blame of others, which may lead to physical and mental problems, including anxiety and depression. It is important to recognize that an inclusive school environment, supportive related sex education curricula and psychological courses may helpful for reducing the harm from unprotected sexual behavior, instead of adopting strict rules to control them. In addition to the influence of macro-level factors such as cultural orientations, it is important to consider the impact of micro-level factors, specifically parenting styles. Parents, as primary agents of socialization, exert a direct and profound influence on their children's development and behaviors.

2.3.2 Micro Level: Parenting Style

The concept of parenting styles was first introduced by Baumrind in the 1960s and further developed by Maccoby and Martin in the 1980s [19][20]. It divided into four types, including authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful parenting style [20]. Authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles are more likely to contribute to individuals' anxiety and depression. In an authoritarian parenting style, parents tend to be overbearing toward their children [19] For example, a parent demanding that a child do something without explanation, simply stating "Because I said so!". This behavior is dictatorial and irrational. Under this circumstance, young individuals may have a sense of depressed, not understood, have been controlled, which increase the risk of suffering anxiety and depression.

Additionally, the neglectful parenting style refers to uninvolved parenting, means parents being largely absent from their children's daily lives [20]. In this case, children's emotions and needs are ignored, without a sense of love and warmth may lead to anxiety and depression. Abundant research shows that neglectful and authoritarian parenting styles can increase the risk for both depression and anxiety among youth [21][22]. Research has reported that most Chinese parents tend to exhibit authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles [23]. This indicates that Chinese parents often ignore their children's emotions and subject them to increased stress, leading to a heightened risk of depression and anxiety. In general, according to Ecological Systems Theory (EST) [7], macro (cultural orientations) and micro (parenting style) factors play critical roles in impacting individuals' anxiety and depression.

2.4 Internal Factors

However, some scholars argue that individual cognition, such as mindset, thoughts, and attitudes, plays a major role in causing depression and anxiety, rather than external fac-

tors [24][25][26]. It can be elucidated by Dweck's mindset theory [9][24]. Dweck suggests that mindset influences one's perceptions on whether their intelligence and ability can be developed or not [9]. She distinguishes mindsets into growth mindset and fixed mindset [24]. Individuals with a growth mindset believes that abilities can be developed, while those who with a fixed mindset believes their abilities are innate and unchangeable [9]. According to a previous study, individuals with more of a fixed mindset are usually avoid to study hard, challenges and difficulties [28]. They consider working hard is the sign of failure and less likely to accept others' success. Therefore, when they in difficulties or face failure, they are more likely to hold a negative attitudes, manifest in anxious and depressive mood, thus may lead to anxiety and depression. By contrast, students with a growth mindset are prone to see failure as the learning experience, and attempt to learn from others, hold a positive attitudes, thus less likely to suffer anxiety and depression [28].

While a significant portion of anxiety and depression stems from internal cognition, these conditions can also be influenced by external factors. Bandura's social cognitive theory highlighted those personal factors (cognition and mindset), behaviors, and the environment interactively impact personal development [28]. Almulla and Al-Rahmi also support Bandura's perspective [27][28]. An individuals' cognition is significantly influenced by its environment, social values and cultural orientations, subsequently influence their mental and physical well-being [28]. It can be concluded that anxiety and depression are caused by both external factors (cultural orientation, parenting style) and internal factors (mindset). Therefore, it is crucial to consider both internal and external factors when implementing relevant strategies.

3 Strategies to Prevent and Reduce Anxiety and Depression

Given the factors discussed above, cultural orientations, parenting styles, and fixed mindsets are crucial to address anxiety and depression among youth. Therefore, efforts should be focused on interventions related to school, family and individual levels, respectively.

3.1 School Level

Schools can play a significant part in moderating risks among students by centering on education and supportive services instead of depending exclusively on strict rules. By addressing the root causes and offering students with the necessary knowledge and additional support services, schools can create an inclusive and supporting environment conducive to learning and individual development.

One appropriate approach is the introduction of comprehensive sex instruction. When schools are concerned about the potential negative results of students' sexual behavior, such as unintended pregnancies or sexually transmitted infectious, they can proactively address these issues through a well-designed sex instruction educational programs. This educational curriculum can give students with accurate information

about sexual well-being. By cultivating an open and inclusive environment, students are way to better equipped to make informed decisions and are more likely to engage in secure behaviors. In differentiate, simply prohibiting relationship can make an climate of fear and disobedience, leading to hazardous behavior.

In addition to sex education, standard mental evaluations are vital in identifying and dealing with mental well-being issues among youth. Schools ought to execute routine screenings to assess signs of negative feelings, anxiety or depression. Early identifying of these issues permits for timely intervention, anticipating them from heightening into more serious issues. By offering proficient mental counseling administrations, schools can give students with the support they ought to adapt with their feelings and create available useful services. Collaboration with third-party organizations can upgrade the extend of administrations accessible, guaranteeing that students get specialized treatment when necessary. This comprehensive approach to mental well-being not only progresses person health but also contributes to a more positive and inclusive school environment.

Furthermore, schools can present programs that advance social and emotional learning (SEL). SEL programs designed to educate students fundamental abilities such as sympathy, self-regulation, and interpersonal communication. These skills are imperative in making students explore the complexities of relationships and social interaction. By integrating SEL into the educational modules, schools can reduce the incidence of bullying, improve peer connections, and create a more inclusive environment. This process may assist them reducing anxiety and depression.

3.2 Family Level

Negative parenting styles are a prevailing calculate contributing to anxiety and depression among youth. Understanding the effect of child rearing on mental well-being is pivotal for cultivating more healthier family atmosphere and supporting children's well-being. Parents play an essential part in forming their children's mental development, and adopting positive child rearing hones can diminish the probability of anxiety and depression.

To moderate the risk related with negative parenting, it is basic to encourage parents to educate themselves about causes of anxiety and depression. This incorporates understanding the different variables that contribute to these mental well-being issues, such as hereditary inclinations, natural stressors, and person personality. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of these variables, parents can better support their children and address potential issues proactively. Moreover, parents should familiarize themselves with the theoretical knowledge behind different child rearing styles. According to Baumrind's research and subsequent studies conducted by Spera, positive parenting study characterized by warmth, responsiveness, and suitable levels of control, can altogether benefit individuals' physical and mental improvement [19]. Authoritative parenting, which balances the demanding and responsiveness, is especially viable in cultivating a steady and supporting environment. This approach helps children improve self-esteem, emotional regulation and resilience, diminishing the chance of anxiety and depression.

Governments and schools can play a significant part in advancing positive child rearing by building up instructive platforms that offer important resources for parents. These platforms can offer workshops, and online courses where parents can learn about positive child rearing hones, discuss common challenges, and share experiences with other parents. Such activities can make a supportive community where parents feel engaged to embrace and keep up positive parenting style.

Parents play a vital part in diminishing the likelihood of anxiety and depression in their children through the appropriation of positive parenting styles. Governments can provide instructive information and platforms for family education. Those collaborative efforts guarantees a comprehensive approach to cultivate a nurturing family environment and benefit for children's mental well-being development

3.3 Individual Level

Numerous mental treatments, including cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and COPE, emphasize understanding individual cognition as a essential step in dealing with anxiety and depression. These treatments center on identifying and challenging negative thought designs and re-framing them with more positive ones. By learning to recognize and alter their cognitive patterns, people can essentially decrease indications of anxiety and depression and improve their mental well-being.

In addition to mental treatment such as CBT and cope, individuals can take a few viable steps to manage anxiety and depression, and improve general mental well-being. Firstly, mindfulness and meditation practice have been shown to decrease anxiety and depression by advancing present-moment mindfulness and relaxation Procedures like deep breathing and guided meditation can calm the mind and reduce the symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Adequate sleep is crucial to mental well-being. Poor sleep quality can compound anxiety and depression, though a regular rest schedule and a serene environment can improve sleep quality. Good sleep hygiene incorporates keeping up a reliable rest plan and making a comfortable, and quite sleep environment. By integrating mindfulness, and high quality sleep into daily schedules, people can proactively manage their mental well-being and improve their health, complementing the benefits gained from psychological intervention like CBT and COPE. These practices collectively cultivate an effective approach to mental health, addressing both the cognitive and physiological aspect of well-being.

4 Limitation and Recommendation

The limitation of the current study is that only critically review the previous studies, which lacks of empirical data to objectively examine the impacts of potential variables on anxiety and depression. Empirical data may enhance the reliability and replicability of current results. Thus, future research is encouraged to conduct mixed research, including qualitative and quantitative research method, to investigate the impacts and re-

relationships among cultural orientations, parenting styles, mindset and the level of anxiety and depression among youth. In addition, the effectiveness of related strategies and interventions need to be further examined by adopting quasi-experimental research.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper utilizes Ecological Systems Theory (EST) and Dweck's mindset theory to analyze both external and internal factors that contribute to anxiety and depression among youth within the Chinese context. It identifies high power distance, high uncertain avoidance, collectivism, negative parenting styles, and fixed mindsets as potential factors leading to youth suffering from anxiety and depression. The paper also proposes specific and targeted strategies at the school, parental and individual levels aimed at preventing and reducing anxiety and depression in young people.

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