



Analysis of Types of Psychological Crises of Chinese College Students

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Abstract

Psychological crises prevention and intervention of Chinese college students are the main emphases of psychological health education in Chinese universities, which become a research hotspot in recent years. This paper, according to Chinese college students' current situations, divides the college students' psychological crises into eight types: adaptive type, learning-pressure type, love and emotional type, interpersonal relationship type, situational type, economy-pressure type, employment-pressure type, synthesizing type and so on, and gives different prevention and intervention measures for different types.

Key words: College students; Psychological crises; Features; Types

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INTRODUCTION

To effectively prevent and intervene college students' psychological crises, it is supposed to correctly understand them, and classify them in a scientific way. Only based on the correct analyses of different types of psychological crises, can the specific prevention and intervention measures effectively work and the coordinated development of the ideological and ethical standards, cultural and scientific qualities and the physical and psychological health be promoted.

1. CONCEPT OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISES

Nowadays, during the theoretical research and intervention practices of college students' psychological crises, people's understandings are not unified, without an agreed concept. Some theoretical articles even make some distortions, which cannot wisely guide college students to reduce psychological crises, on the contrary, may even mislead them. Therefore, it is indispensable to understand college students' psychological crises correctly, define them accurately, and clear the connotation of them.

1.1 Crises

To accurately define college students' psychological crises, the first step is to understand the meaning of "crisis". In Chinese, crisis has two meanings: the bane of danger and the very difficult juncture (*Modern Chinese dictionary*, 1983). First, it means the bane of danger, not obvious but potential danger, which may lead to a disaster. Second, it means the very difficult juncture, a crucial stage or turning point in the course of something.

Nowadays, the word "crisis" has been widely used. People use it to indicate the potential danger from all aspects, or the very difficult juncture after adding qualifiers, such as economic crisis, political crisis, ecological crisis, crisis of confidence and so on. Psychological crisis is also among them, and is the potential danger and critical moment that may bring the disasters, which is related to psychology of human subject. It is not correct to regard crisis as the psychological crisis in some papers. In Xu's (2007) book *Research on the Early Warning Mechanism of College Students' Psychological Crises*, he said, "crisis here is a psychological state of people when they are faced with things or situations beyond their resources and capacities and can't cope with them." The author defined the crisis as a psychological state, and apparently he mixed the

two different things, which was biased. Shao (2009) also said in his book *Exploration on College Students' Psychological Crises and Intervention Mechanism*, "crisis is a kind of psychological imbalance produced by an individual when he encounters an event which he can't escape or solve in an usual way." It is inadvisable to misuse crisis with psychological crisis so one should avoid this situation in our study and practice.

1.2 Psychological Crises

Among the Chinese research papers on psychological crises, many people use the quotation of the concept of G. Caplan, an American psychologist, to define psychological crises. In 1998, Long Di was the first one to quote G. Caplan's concept of psychological crisis in his papers. When one is faced with a difficult situation, and can't cope with it in the previous way or accustomed supporting system, that is to say, the situation he encounters is beyond his ability, he will suffer from the temporary psychological distress, which is called psychological crises (Long, 1998). In 2006, Zeng said in his papers *Reach Reviews on College Students' Psychological Crisis Intervention*, "So far, almost every theoretical document on psychological crisis intervention has quoted psychologist G. Caplan's creative theory... His definition of psychological crisis widely accepted until today."

G. Caplan's concept on psychological crisis contains the following meanings. First, it defines that the difficult situation is the cause for one to have the psychological crisis. Second, the situation is the trouble that people can not cope with at present. Third, it defines that the difficult situation makes people have psychological distress rather than others. That is to say, it is psychological crisis rather than any other crisis. Fourth, the psychological distress is a state of psychological imbalance rather than others, which is temporary and may disappear or further deteriorate. G. Caplan's concept on psychological crisis plays a great role in the researches on psychological crisis and its prevention and intervention in China and has a positive significance. Nevertheless, G. Caplan's concept on psychological crisis does not illustrate the dangerous results which individual psychological imbalance may bring, not same as the Chinese word "crisis" referring to the bane of danger. When one quote G. Caplan's concept on psychological crisis, one should compare it with Chinese etymological meaning of the word "crisis", get a further understanding and then define the concept of psychological crisis.

All theories are no universal. Besides, the degree of localization of the crisis intervention study in our country is not high. Therefore, it is imperative to accelerate the process of localization development and improve the degree of localization continuously (Zhu, 2011). One define the psychological crisis as a temporary and urgent psychological imbalance, which may do serious harm to himself, others, as well as society when mental ability

of an individual or groups is insufficient in face of a difficult situation.

1.3 College Students' Psychological Crises

In the researches on college students' psychological crises in China, the definition of the concept of college students' psychological crises is not many. Among the limited concepts about college students' psychological crises, what's more typical is the concept presented by Shao Changyu in his book *Exploration on College Students' Psychological Crises and Intervention Mechanism* in 2009. He said, "College students' psychological crisis means that college students cannot cope with problems in a usual way, and react to internal and external stressful events because they can't overcome psychological conflicts or external stimuli" (Shao, 2009). In 2010, Gao said in his paper *Causes and Prevention and Control Strategies of College Students' Psychological Crises*,

The so-called college students' psychological crisis comes about like this—When college students are stimulated by some emergencies or faced with the huge difficulties which they cannot overcome in a short period and then feel helpless, or faced with the difficult situations beyond their abilities which they've have confronted, they will have the temporary psychological confusion. The long-term psychological imbalance as a result of the sudden is the psychological crisis.

College students' psychological crisis is one kind of the crises. As far as Shao Changyu is concerned, college students' psychological crisis is a psychological reaction of college students which is not the same as the original meaning of "crisis", so it is in need of the further discussion. The definition presented by Gao Liukai is that "college students' psychological crisis refers to...this type of... is psychological crisis." It is not scientific to regard college students' psychological crisis as the general psychological crisis.

The basic construction standards of Students' psychological health education work in General Institutions of Higher Education (Trial) (Ideological and Political Education Department [2011]NO.1) issued by Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2011 said that colleges should establish regulations and regimes on the basis of psychological health education, standard management of enquiry agencies, psychological crisis prevention and intervention, working process of psychological counseling, curriculums of psychological health education, norms of occupational ethics of psychological health education practitioners and so on. It is the first time to put forward the concept of psychological crisis prevention and intervention in the official document, which is a special one made by Ministry of Education, aiming at psychological health education of college students. The concept of psychological crisis only refers to college students' psychological crises without explanation. One should

define the concept of college students' psychological crisis accurately so that one can do a better job in psychological crisis prevention and intervention.

From all stated above, one can define college students' psychological crisis as a temporary and urgent psychological imbalance, which may do serious harm to himself, others, as well as the society when mental ability of an individual or groups is insufficient in face of the difficult situations. It high lights the following meanings. First, the main parts of college students' psychological crisis are college students, which are distinguished from cadres, soldiers and farmers. And it refers not only an individual but also groups. Second, the causes of college students' psychological crisis are the insufficient psychological ability and the difficult situation. Third, if college students' psychological crises can't be intervened effectively, they will be harmful to themselves, others and the society. Fourth, college students' psychological crisis is in time of danger. Fifth, college students' psychological crisis manifests the state of psychological imbalance.

2. FEATURES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS

At present, there are many relative researches on college students' psychological crisis. Zhuo and Wu (2009) hold the view that crisis is full of complexity, abruptness, urgency, painfulness, helplessness, harmfulness and so on. Xiao, Chen, and Li (2011) think that college students' crisis is full of abruptness, irritability, painfulness, danger, accidentalness, time-limitedness and so on. Chen (2011) thinks that crisis is full of development, interactivity, susceptibility, potentiality and so on. Based on the definition of college students' psychological crisis in this paper, one hold the opinion that college students' psychological crisis consists of the following features.

2.1 Coexistence of Development and Existence

The average age of contemporary college students is about 20 years, most of whom are fully-matured physiologically, at least approaching maturity. Nevertheless, they are still far from the real mature in terms of psychological development. It is the imbalanced development of body and mind that contributes to college students' psychological crisis. On the other hand, college students have gradually raised their self-consciousness, always regard themselves as adults, and urgently require the society to treat them as adults. Our society often treats college students on the basis of physiological standard, regards them as adults completely, and makes demands of social requirements that is beyond their mental developmental level, which may make students bear burdensome mental stress, even lead to psychological problems and then trigger psychological

crises. College students' psychological crises are caused by the imbalanced development of physical and mental development, and the contradiction between social development requirements and the actual psychological development level of college students, reflects the developmental characteristics of college students' psychological crises.

College students are in the crucial period of the formation of views of world, life and values. With their awareness of self-consciousness, some thoughts about important and basic issues of life, such as the recognition of the aim, significance, values and responsibilities of life, will lead to the inner conflict and anxiety of inner heart. College students will have many psychological conflicts in the process of self-awareness and pursuit of life meaning, which may result in psychological crises if not resolved. Thus one can draw a conclusion that college students' psychological crisis has the characteristic of existence.

2.2 Coexistence of Potentiality and Abruptness

Before the outbreak of college students' psychological crises, there is often a long eclipse period. During this period, college students' psychology may have some problems, which will accumulate and worsen gradually, even some of which may influence the behavior. But these psychological problems are small, neither easy to be found out nor indicate the serious harmfulness. With the accumulation of psychological problems, gathering of the environment and conditions forming college students' psychological crises and the appearance of stressful events which cause college students' psychological crises, college students' psychological crises comes out finally. During the long period between the appearance of mental problems and final outburst, it indicates the potentiality. This period is particularly noticeable, and the mental problems will be eliminated at the beginning moment and avoid happening frequently if it can be found and intervened earlier.

Because of the features of potentiality, college students' psychological crisis is not easy to find. Once the conditions available, it will show its harmfulness. Therefore, college students' psychological crisis always shows its abruptness. While realizing the feature of abruptness, one should focus on the feature of potentiality.

2.3 Coexistence of Harmfulness and Accidentalness

The occurrence of college students' psychological crisis is of some harm, leading to serious consequences, which include self-hurt, suicide, hurting or killing others, disrupting social public system, group events and so on. "Suicide of college students is no longer an extreme case, which tends to be increasing" (Du, Liu, Zhang, & Wang, 2006). "Recently, serious events of hurting or killing others frequently occur on end in some colleges because

of students' abnormal psychology. They are very painful lessons" (Ministry of Education, 2003, No.2). At present, researches on college students' psychological crises focus more on the harm of suicide and killing others, but focus less on the harm of disrupting social public system and group events. As a matter of fact, the harm of disrupting social public system by college students' psychological crises cannot be ignored, which tends to be more serious. For example, events of college students attacking and disrupting the public net system, public security system, and public transportation system occur all the time, the main cause of which is the harm from college students' psychological crises.

Although college students' psychological crisis has the features of potentiality and elusion, one can recognize the psychological crises by some ways and methods. One cannot intervene until one understand and grasp college students' psychological crises. Taking the opportunities, and intervening actually, timely and effectively will make college students' psychological crises be solved effectively, rather than causing some dangerous consequences. Without the timely and efficient intervention, college students' psychological crises will do serious harm to society. Therefore, one should take the opportunity to avoid harmfulness.

3. TYPES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENT'S PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISES

If one want to deliver effective intervention to cope with college students' psychological crises, firstly one should make a scientific classification for this crises that is useful for a better understanding of this situation. Then one can make effective strategy of interventions for each crisis's feature. Eventually one can deliver psychological intervention efficiently. According to present researches, there has been no one who makes a clear classification for this crisis. But in these researches many quoted psychologist Brammer's classification, which has three types including developing crises, situational crises and existential crises. Xu (2007), Zhuo and Wu (2009), and Ma (2009) also quoted in their articles from Brammer's classification, which is a common undertaking for present researches in classification of psychological crises. In addition, Baldwin proposes a psychological crises classification system in favor of evaluation and remedy that classifies psychological morbidity level from weak one to strong one, including six types such as inclination crises, interim crises, trauma crises, evolution crises, psychological disorder crises and serious psychological disorder crises. Chinese scholar Duan and Cheng (2006) has classified crises into four categories, such as developing crises, situational crises, existential crises and obstacle crises. This category is a common and basic classification of psychological crises

that has made a great impact on crises researches. The above classifications reflect a strong sense of psychology, and not only the concept understanding but also the practical guide needs a hard foundation of psychology. Every psychological crisis has its own cause, feature, pertinence of intervention, which is invisible sometimes. These theoretical classifications are different from practical works in real life. In order to effectively guide psychological interventions, one needs a further clear classification. Duan and Cheng (2006) suggests that university students who are members of a particular group experience development crises frequently such as break-up accident, academic failure and sex puzzlement, etc.

College students' psychological crises can depend on different criteria to make different classifications of this crisis. According to students' different characteristics, the crises can be divided into four groups including female students' psychological and male students' psychological crises; freshmen's psychological crises, sophomores' psychological crises, senior students' psychological crises, postgraduates' psychological crises and older students' psychological crises; rural students' psychological crises, town students' psychological crises; poor-family students' psychological crises and single-parent-family students' psychological crises. According to the danger of university students' psychological crises, one can divide it into three levels crises such as first-level psychological crises, second-level psychological crises and third-level psychological crises (Ma & Li, 2011). Depending on different stages of the crises one can divide it into potential psychological crises and burst psychological crises. This article plans to make a classification of university students' psychological crises relying on their different causes, so the classification can be divided into eight types including adaption university students' psychological crises, learning pressure university students' psychological crises, love emotion psychological crises, interpersonal relationship psychological crises, circumstance psychological crises, economic pressure psychological crises, employment pressure psychological crises, and comprehensive psychological crises, etc.

3.1 College Students' Psychological Crises of Adaptation

Adaptation psychological crisis mainly refers to the psychological imbalance caused by university students' maladjustments of new study, life and interpersonal relationship environment. To freshmen, the first problem is to finish the transformation from high school students to college students so as to adapt to the environment of university. Due to the big differences of the management of high schools and colleges, students are required to have the ability of self-management and self-care. Some students cannot manage themselves well during college periods, lacking the ability of independent decision-making which could cause maladjustments or even

symptoms of maladaptation. The failure of environmental psychological adaptation may cause weariness and relationship strains. Therefore, students' maladjustments to environment are the main reasons for freshmen's psychological crises. So it should be concerned during this period.

3.2 College Students' Psychological Crises of Learning Pressure

Learning achievements are the main points for parents, teachers, classmates, society and employers to evaluate students, and it is also the most important thing for students. In college, the courses learnt contains large capacity of information, and the teaching methods are different from that of high school. Students' performance of certain professional courses is not related to their performance in high school. All these factors could easily cause the difficulty for some students to get the study method of university courses and influence students' university performance. However, college classmates' performances in university entrance examination are very close. The learning competition basically restarts from the beginning, and the performance is directly determined by their efforts. On one hand, the number of college courses is large, and some colleges have the requirement of passing certain foreign language and computer examinations. If students fail to meet the requirement, they can't get their degree or even graduate, which makes students feel stressful about their study. On the other hand, due to the requirement of employers, students have to participate in various qualification and grade tests except finishing their heavy compulsory courses, which aggravate the university students' study loads. In addition, students' maladjustments and rejection to their major also put much pressure on their study. Those loads and pressure could easily cause psychological and physical fatigue, which triggers psychological crises.

3.3 College Students' Psychological Crises of Interpersonal Relationship

The contemporary college students are almost the only children in their families, and their growth environment is limited. So those students may have personality deficiency during interpersonal interaction. Some only children are the best in the eyes of parents and teachers, so they are always self-centered, lacking the ability, patient, passion, trust and skills of communication. All these weaknesses will be exposed in their college group life. Relationship strains among college roommates are the significant risk of psychological crises explosion. Easy to be proud of themselves and unable to appreciate others are also the performance of lacking interpersonal interaction ability. So it makes students become passive, then the "wall" between classmates becomes thicker and thicker. Except for the relationship strains between classmates, college students always fail to communicate with teachers, parents

or other social members. When meeting relationship strains, some of them act weakly to anti-setback ability. The proud they show is not in accord to their low self-confidence. Once meeting difficulties, they don't have the courage to face them or the ability to solve them. It will easily make the students not know what to do when faced with interpersonal relationship failure, and by this the psychological crises will occur.

3.4 College Students' Psychological Crises Out of Relationship Problems

College students are still in the phase of growing into adults, which means they are still adolescents. But because of their physical mature, it is natural for them to become interested in the opposite sex and have the desire to pursue them. According to laws and regulations concerning the love of colleges, it is quite acceptable to have a girlfriend or a boyfriend. And it is also becoming more and more common to be in a relationship in colleges. Being in love may become a good thing, for the two can choose a way to supervise and urge each other in their studies, and make more progress together. However, there are many students immature in psychology, lacking experience in love affairs and being unable to tackle setbacks in their relationships. (For instances, turned down by people who they admire, suffering breakups in their love affairs, inadvertent behaviors and conflicts between love, study and career, etc.) Such situation may lead to psychological crises.

3.5 College Students' Situational Psychological Crises

Situational psychological crisis means natural or man-made disasters, events which are accidental, unexpected and unmanageable. It imposes great unbearable pressure on undergraduates, which may lead to mental crises. In recent years, there're a series of floods, SARS, snow disasters, earthquakes, waterlogging and other natural calamities happening frequently. These disasters brought great impacts on some students and their families and some were hurt deeply, which have thrown them in severe psychological trauma. One thing leads to another, it causes secondary traumatic event. Unexpected man-made disasters like family member's sudden death, parents' emotion break, bankrupt family, criminal punishment on family member, idol disillusioned, suffering from physical abuse or property violated and such experiences, things are uncontrollable to happen. Once things like these taking place on any university student, it can be extremely frustrating and make them feel helpless, which may ignite psychological crises.

3.6 Psychological Crises From Economic Pressure

Currently, children education expenditures are becoming the largest expense in many Chinese families, especially the higher education (Duan & Cheng, 2006, p.52). For lower-income rural families, families suffering from

economic difficulties, such as urban low-income residents, it is a great pressure to afford one or even more children to go to school. Many families are in debts for this very reason. Recent years, our country has made new policies, subsidy methods consisting of scholarship, loan, assistance which really alleviated the tuition pressure. However, with the living expenses increasing gradually, students coming from low-income families still have to face the problem of lacking money. Some students find that part-time jobs can be their solutions, while others who are in need of money but can't get a part-time job will be put in difficulty, feeling helpless and inferior, plunging into psychological crises. Having different financial backgrounds, students are of different consumption capability and habits. They are inclined to envy others who have good home conditions, and hold a high-consuming life, some of them want to "keep up with the Joneses", which lead to an unnecessary and unrealistic comparison and make a heavy psychological burden. Some even try to impress their lovers by spending money beyond their financial abilities.

3.7 Psychological Crises From Employment Pressure

It is very common to be anxious about employment in future for university students. They have no idea about their whereabouts and what to do after graduation and being afraid of disappointing their parents. University students are no longer blessed, for higher education is becoming popular and employment environment is more competitive. They have to be well prepared for getting a job the moment they enter colleges. Pressure coming from this source is becoming the biggest stressful thing during their college lives and also the primary cause of psychological crises.

Psychological pressure coming from employment pressures is also in job hunting process. On one hand, the employers are asking more from college students, such as knowledge structure, social practice and comprehensive ability. On the other hand, college students also have higher expectations, like work in urban city instead of going to places having harsh conditions. Taking the following into consideration, such as unhealthy tendency in some professions, discrimination for different backgrounds and different gender, many students who are unable to find a job or have mental gap in finding a satisfying job, are easy to get into psychological crises.

Classification above is according to main causes of college students' psychological crises. College students' psychological crises may be outcome of one or two factors' combination. When one come to work on coping with strategies, it is important to find out the essential reason why that they are suffering from psychological crises.

Classification stated above is also in accordance with the requirements of the relevant ministries and commissions of the state. The ministry of education, the

ministry of health of the People's Republic of China, the communist youth league central "on further strengthening and improving college students' mental health education of opinion" pointed out: "It is important to offer psychological guidance and consulting services to the new students, new graduates, and impoverished students, especially for learning difficulties students, lovelorn students, rule-breakers and abnormal ones, helping them solve psychological stress, overcome psychological obstacles" (Ministry of Education, 2005, No.1). Only by being able to tell the distinctions of different psychological problems, can one take timely action preventing students having psychological problems from hurting themselves or others. Knowing the classification of psychological crises can make us better equipped to discover problem students and take care of them, in case any accident happening, such as suicide and inflicting harm on others (Ministry of Education, 2005, No.1).

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