

Research progress on psychological interventions for adolescent emotional disorders from the perspective of positive psychology

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Abstract: Emotional disorders are one of the common factors that currently affect the psychological development of adolescents. Amount of studies about emotional issues of adolescents have been done based on positive psychology, and have achieved some certain effect. This article primarily introduces the current situation of emotional disorders in adolescents. It provides a detailed explanation and summary of positive psychology in terms of theory and methods. It analyzes and summarizes the empirical research on positive psychological interventions for adolescent emotional disorders both at home and abroad. Based on this, it explores the future development direction of positive psychological interventions in the field of adolescent emotional disorders, providing a reference for the further improvement of intervention models for adolescents with emotional disorders.

Keywords: positive psychology; adolescents; emotional disorders; psychological interventions; psychotherapy

1. Introduction

Adolescents are the main group affected by emotional disorders, with clinical manifestations predominantly including anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, or somatic functional disorders [1]. The causes of these disorders are complex, with biological factors being the fundamental cause. However, to a large extent, social and psychological factors can also contribute to emotional disorders in adolescents. In addition, the individual's personality traits, self-awareness, cognitive patterns, and even the social environment, especially the historical-cultural background, are all important factors [2].

In terms of interventions and treatments, it has been pointed out that pharmacotherapy for emotional disorders in children and adolescents is often ineffective, with a high incidence of adverse reactions [3-4]. Studies show that intervention and treatment through psychological education for adolescents with depressive symptoms have shown significant efficacy [5]. Furthermore, some studies indicate that combining medication with cognitive-behavioral therapy for treating emotional disorders in adolescents also yields significant results [6]. In recent years, positive psychology, as an emerging field of psychological research, has made meaningful researches in the prevention, intervention, and treatment of emotional disorders in adolescents.

2. The relevant theories of positive psychological intervention

2.1 Positive psychology

Positive psychology, proposed by American psychologists Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi in 2000 in their book "Introduction to Positive Psychology," is an innovation and transcendence of humanistic psychology [7]. It aims to explore the psychological changes of individuals undergo when experiencing negative life events and how they can maintain or rebuild their quality of life. Positive psychology advocates for reinterpreting psychological phenomena and issues with a positive mindset, thus eliciting individuals' inherent or potential positive qualities and strengths [8]. Positive psychology is one of the

fastest-growing branches in contemporary psychology^[9-10]. Lomas and others have established it as a truly interdisciplinary science^[11]. Currently, research on positive psychology is primarily focused on the scientific study of positive states, traits, and behaviors that contribute to life quality^[12]. Positive psychology takes positive qualities of individuals as its research subject and aims to develop individual abilities to achieve optimal functioning and happiness. Its therapeutic principles and methods are based on humanistic psychology. Currently, positive psychology theory has been widely applied in the treatment and research of psychological disorders and chronic diseases. According to Wong, the two goals that positive psychology should accomplish are overcoming and transforming the negative aspects while enhancing the positive aspects, thereby reducing the incidence of psychological disorders and increasing well-being^[13]. Positive psychology has been receiving increasing attention from scholars worldwide and has gradually become a global research trend^[14]. In China, the emergence of positive psychology dates back earlier, but it only began to receive attention and recognition around 2006, and the research level still lags that of behind developed countries^[15].

2.2 Positive psychological intervention

Positive psychology intervention (PPI) is a form of psychological therapy guided by the principles of positive psychology. Its goal is to enhance individuals' positive emotions, cognition, or behaviors, rather than reducing the incidence of symptoms, problems, or obstacles^[15]. It focuses on cultivating positive emotions, personal strengths, and positive cognition, aiming to help people improve their well-being through the aspects of happiness, engagement, and meaning^[16]. Eliminating psychological barriers does not automatically lead to happiness, and a meaningful life does not arise solely from the elimination of suffering. Therefore, PPI does not focus on how to help individuals cure their pathological symptoms or adjust negative states, but rather seeks to increase individuals' positive experiences, behaviors, cognition, and happiness through interventions. According to Hendriks et al., PPI refers to a collective term of interventions that use theoretically and empirically based approaches or strategies to increase positive emotions, behaviors, and cognition, thereby enhancing participants' sense of well-being^[17]. Compared to traditional problem-centered approaches, PPI often provides self-directed cognitive-behavioral exercises that help improve individuals' engagement rates^[18]. PPI include Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy, Well-being Therapy, and Posttraumatic Growth and so on. These interventions do not force patients to have positive reactions to adverse experiences or attempt to change the course of their illness. Instead, they aim to help individuals respond positively through intervention. This article mainly elaborates on mindfulness therapy and introspective cognitive therapy.

2.2.1 Mindfulness Therapy

Mindfulness, originated from the Eastern practice of meditation, is one of the "Eightfold Path" of Buddhist practice. In the 1970s, Kabat-Zinn integrated mindfulness therapy with medical psychology, and it has since been widely used in Western clinical settings for the psychosomatic treatment of individuals with psychological disorders^[19-22]. In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to research on the role of mindfulness therapy in mood and emotion regulation. Common forms of mindfulness therapy include Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), etc. The core of mindfulness therapy lies in the ability to focus on one's own feelings and experiences in different aspects of life, to better understand one's emotions and bodily sensations, and thereby gain better control over them. Originally applied in the field of recurrent depression in clinical settings, mindfulness therapy primarily helps patients enhance internal focus, accept their current state, and reduce stress levels in order to improve their treatment outcomes, alleviate symptoms, and promote recovery from illness^[23]. By undergoing mindfulness training, individuals can strengthen the connection between their body and mind, facilitate self-regulation, and ultimately achieve physical and mental well-being. Relevant studies have shown that individuals who have undergone mindfulness therapy experience a significant increase in positive emotions and emotional functioning. In the studies of patients with eating disorders, the longitudinal study conducted by Thompson, Brenner, et al. found that the implementation of mindfulness therapy had beneficial effects on depression and emotional functioning in individuals with high-level eating disorders^[24]. A study on post-bariatric surgery patients with eating disorder symptoms found that after mindfulness therapy, the patients' emotional eating showed improvement^[25]. Currently, psychologists and experts from various disciplines in China have conducted extensive research on mindfulness and mindfulness therapy. Additionally, mindfulness therapy is widely used as a psychological regulation method among the general population^[26].

2.2.2 Naikan Cognitive Therapy

Naikan Cognitive Therapy (NCT) was proposed by Li Zhentao in 1995. It combines mindfulness therapy from the East with Beck's cognitive therapy from the West. NCT follows the "Three Themes of

Mindfulness" and encourages individuals to recall life events from their growth process. It helps them observe and experience important interpersonal relationships from multiple perspectives, reevaluate emotions such as satisfaction, gratitude, and guilt, challenge and change persistent self-centeredness, identify and correct irrational cognitions, and achieve harmonious integration of subjective and objective perception [27]. The essence of NCT is to observe one's inner self, emphasize self-reflection, reshape one's own and others' images, and emphasize gratitude. In terms of application, NCT has shown certain effectiveness in adolescent mental health education and the treatment of clinical schizophrenia. Researches show that NCT can effectively improve the psychological resilience of left-behind college students, helping them control negative emotions and mobilize psychological resources to solve difficulties when facing negative life events [28]. In the clinical field, NCT can effectively alleviate clinical symptoms and interpersonal difficulties in patients with schizophrenia, increase their self-awareness of the illness, improve their attitude towards treatment, promote medication compliance, and significantly reduce the recurrence rate of the disease [29].

3. Research on positive psychological interventions for the prevention and treatment of adolescent emotional disorders

3.1 Empirical research on positive psychological interventions for the prevention and treatment of adolescent emotional disorders in foreign countries

In the field of positive psychological intervention research abroad, Raque-Bogdan et al. conducted a study on positive psychological interventions for cancer survivors and their caregivers, and found that positive psychological interventions can effectively help patients and caregivers improve their sense of happiness, reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, and enhance their treatment compliance and confidence in rehabilitation and prognosis [30]. Koydemir et al., in a meta-analysis, found that positive psychological interventions can increase subjective well-being and life satisfaction, leading to effective relief of physical symptoms, anxiety, depression, and ultimately reducing the risk of suicide [31]. Hernandez et al. applied an integrated strategy of positive psychological interventions to hemodialysis patients with depressive symptoms, and the results showed that the intervention significantly reduced patients' depressive symptoms [32]. In addition, positive psychological interventions can also help participants alleviate stress, reduce pain, enhance subjective well-being and life satisfaction, and lower their risk of suicide [33].

3.2 Empirical research on positive psychological interventions for the prevention and treatment of adolescent emotional disorders in China

In recent years, Chinese psychologists have conducted a significant amount of empirical research on positive psychological interventions for the prevention and treatment of adolescent emotional disorders, particularly online interventions based on web platforms have been widely developed. Wang Xinrui et al. conducted a study using WeChat platform to implement positive psychological interventions for graduate students, which resulted in continuous increase in participants' depression scores, and self-evaluation of intervention effectiveness confirmed that the intervention exercises had a positive impact and effectively enhanced their subjective well-being [34]. Yan Meiqin et al. conducted PPI based on the PERMA model for pregnant women during childbirth. The intervention was found to be interesting and entertaining, and meets the psychological needs of contemporary pregnant women. It effectively reduced childbirth fear and improved overall happiness [35]. Zhao Jinping et al. conducted a randomized controlled trial using positive psychological interventions as the basis for college students with psychological abnormalities. The results showed that positive psychological interventions had a good effect on mental health education for college students with psychological abnormalities, effectively improving their mental health levels, reducing stress, and helping them improve their coping strategies [36]. Wang Jiangyang et al. implemented positive psychological interventions for orphans in upper grades of elementary school. The research findings showed that positive psychological interventions can increase positive emotions and improve emotional balance among orphaned students. It also increased their overall life satisfaction, and the intervention effects were sustained [37]. Furthermore, positive psychological group counseling can effectively reduce the suicide rate and improve the physical and mental health levels of university students with suicidal ideation.

4. Discussion

Positive psychology, as an effective means of preventing and treating emotional disorders, does not change or deny traditional psychological therapy methods. Instead, it complements these traditional approaches. Positive psychological interventions can help individuals build confidence, enhance hope,

unleash their potential, and increase their happiness level. Positive psychology focuses on human strengths and qualities, which is not in conflict with traditional intervention theories. It does not solely emphasize strengths while neglecting negative factors, but rather places more emphasis on positive qualities. It overcomes the shortcomings of negative psychology by shifting the focus from negative factors to positive factors and criticize the "post hoc treatment" model of negative psychology to propose the positive concept of "prevention". Positive psychologists believe that individuals have the inherent ability to resist risks and effective prevention can be achieved through exploring and cultivating their positive qualities. Exploring the role of PPI in preventing and treating adolescent emotional disorders has great practical significance.

However, as an emerging field, positive psychology also has its developmental limitations. Friedman and Brown argue that positive psychology lacks a unified metatheory to support its scientific philosophy [38]. Firstly, in terms of research subjects, the samples are still not comprehensive and there are few studies focused on adolescents, with many concentrating on clinical illnesses and mental disorders. Secondly, due to the different socio-cultural values in Eastern and Western societies, people's understanding of positive qualities may vary. Therefore, existing methods cannot be blindly applied in practical interventions and should be adjusted and improved based on the specific circumstances. Thirdly, the intervention programs in positive psychology are not yet sufficiently systematic and effective, and there is still a lack of attention to the prevention of emotional disorders in adolescents. Fourthly, the intervention methods in positive psychology lack specificity. Due to individual differences, a single psychological intervention program may not be applicable to every individual. Currently, most interventions are carried out in group counseling settings, which may overlook the differences between individuals. Therefore, in future research and practice, it is necessary to pay attention to cultural and individual differences, explore positive psychological intervention programs which are suitable for Chinese adolescents, to effectively promote the development of positive psychology in China.

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