

Psychological Health Challenges at the Graduate Stage from the Perspective of Positive Psychology

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Abstract: In recent years, the number of graduate students in China has been increasing steadily. Along with changes in the economic and employment environment, graduate students face growing psychological health challenges. This study aims to explore the psychological health challenges at the graduate stage from the perspective of positive psychology. The research reveals that psychological health issues during the graduate stage are universal, primarily manifested as academic pressure, anxiety, depression, and interpersonal relationship problems. From the standpoint of positive psychology, this paper analyzes the potential of positive factors such as positive emotions, self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and social support in enhancing graduate students' psychological health. However, the study also points out challenges and limitations, including individual differences, cultural disparities, and academic pressures. Future research and practices should focus more on cultural adaptability, long-term effects, individual differences, and interdisciplinary research to better address graduate students' psychological health challenges and improve their overall quality of life.

Keywords: Positive Psychology; Graduate Education; Psychological Health Education

As domestic higher education becomes more popular and competition intensifies, more and more undergraduate graduates choose to continue their postgraduate studies. The postgraduate period is full of challenges, and mental health challenges such as academic pressure, life pressure, emotional distress, and interpersonal problems are increasingly exacerbated. These mental health challenges have a profound impact on an individual's academic achievement, career development, and overall quality of life. Positive psychology is a branch of psychological research that focuses on individual strengths, emotional regulation and psychological resilience. It inherits the rational core of humanistic and scientific psychology, revises and compensates for some deficiencies in psychology, and turns to the positive aspects of human nature, emphasizing positive factors such as positive emotion, self-efficacy and social support, contrary to the pessimistic view of human nature in the past. Positive psychology believes that the purpose of psychological research is not only to remove people's psychological or behavioral problems, but to help people form good psychological qualities and behavioral patterns. People who do not have problems do not mean that they can naturally form a good psychological quality and behavior pattern. The proposal of positive psychology provides a new idea for the mental health education of graduate students. By introducing positive psychology methods into postgraduate mental health education, we have the opportunity to help postgraduate students better cope with challenges, improve their mental health levels, and better implement the fundamental mission of "cultivating people with moral integrity" for university educators.

1. The Emergence of Positive Psychology and Its Application in Education

Positive psychology, originating in the 1990s, was proposed by psychologists such as Martin Seligman^[1]. It represents a shift from the negative focus of psychology research, such as psychological problems and disorders, towards positive emotions, human strengths, and happiness. Positive psychology emphasizes human potential and happiness, suggesting that life quality can be improved through psychological interventions^[2]. The application of positive psychology in the field of education has been widespread since the 1990s. Numerous studies have shown that positive psychology methods can enhance students' happiness, facilitate joyful learning, develop self-efficacy, cope with academic challenges confidently, improve motivation and academic performance, alleviate negative emotions, foster positive social relationships, enhance social skills, and improve the quality of interpersonal relationships^[3]. Additionally, research indicates that applying positive psychology methods in schools and educational institutions can improve the school atmosphere, enhance the positivity of the educational

environment, and consequently promote students' academic success and psychological health^[4].

In summary, the application of positive psychology in education aims to enhance students' academic performance, happiness, and psychological health. It emphasizes individual positive qualities, emotions, and self-efficacy, providing tools and strategies to improve the learning experience and school atmosphere. This is crucial for the comprehensive development of students.

2. Psychological problems are common among graduate students

The graduate stage is a crucial turning point in many individuals' lives, filled with challenges. Academic pressure, life pressure, emotional disturbances, and interpersonal relationship issues have become increasingly prominent challenges to psychological health. These psychological health challenges have far-reaching effects on individuals' academic achievements, career development, and overall quality of life. Research indicates that mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression symptoms, are quite common during the graduate stage^[5]. Over half of graduate students experience moderate to high levels of anxiety symptoms during their graduate careers. Many university counseling centers have reported an increase in the demand for mental health counseling among graduate students. Furthermore, some studies have found a higher suicide rate among graduate students, emphasizing the increasing prevalence of mental health issues. In response to these challenges, universities and educational institutions need to take proactive measures to raise awareness of graduate students' mental health, provide appropriate support, and allocate resources to address the increasingly widespread and severe mental health issues among graduate students^[6].

3. Common Psychological Challenges at the Graduate Stage

Amid the increasing prevalence of psychological issues among graduate students, certain common challenges are emerging in the management of graduate education. Addressing these challenges through positive psychology methods can contribute to students' personal growth and comprehensive development.

3.1. Academic Pressure and Competition

The graduate career is often accompanied by significant academic pressure, including research projects, thesis writing, and various exams. Particularly in some STEM disciplines, where courses are challenging, graduation requirements are high, and scholarship competition is intense, the academic demands on graduate students can be overwhelming. Additionally, graduate students need to accumulate professional experience, participate in academic conferences, and establish professional networks. These demands may increase the learning burden on graduate students, elevate their psychological stress levels, and, if not managed effectively, lead to issues such as anxiety and depression.

3.2. Work-Life Balance

The substantial academic pressure often makes it challenging for graduate students to maintain a work-life balance. Long hours in experiments and research, neglecting rest and recreation, and lacking social and emotional support can negatively impact psychological health.

3.3. Social Isolation

Some graduate students have a small social circle and limited social interactions, which may lead to feelings of social isolation. In situations that encourage independent research, students are more prone to experiencing loneliness and social isolation, potentially resulting in psychological issues or abnormalities^[7].

3.4. Financial Pressure

Despite the comprehensive system of scholarships, student loans, and grants for graduate students in China, some still face financial pressures related to tuition and living expenses. Economic stress can lead to psychological pressure and problems.

3.5. Employment Pressure

In the post-pandemic era, with significant changes in the economic and social environment, many graduate students face uncertainty and fierce market competition after graduation. This employment pressure can trigger anxiety and depression, affecting psychological health.

4. Addressing Graduate Students' Psychological Challenges with Positive Psychology Methods

4.1. Positive Emotions and Emotional Regulation Strategies

In positive psychology theory, positive emotion is defined as a positive emotional state, usually manifested as joy, contentment, happiness, and optimism. These emotions are the opposite of negative emotions (such as anxiety, depression) and are an important component of an individual's mental health and well-being. Positive emotion regulation can help graduate students improve their sense of well-being, quality of social relationships, creativity and innovation, psychological resilience, and physical health^[8].

Positive emotion regulation strategies are methods used to enhance positive emotions and improve mental health and well-being. Mental health educators in colleges and universities can use positive emotion regulation strategies in positive psychology to help improve the mental health of graduate students. For example, organize an emotional regulation salon for graduate students to teach them effective emotional regulation techniques such as positive thinking, meditation, and deep breathing to help them better deal with stress and negative emotions; promote the daily practice of positive psychology, set up a gratitude corner, and encourage positive speech and positive feedback to promote the sharing and dissemination of positive emotions; establish a postgraduate mental health mutual aid group to encourage postgraduate students to share positive emotional experiences through case analysis and group discussions, and provide mutual support to help postgraduate students realize how positive emotions can improve mental health. Organize artistic and creative activities, such as painting, writing or music workshops, to promote the expression and release of positive emotions. Through the application of these positive emotion regulation strategies, graduate students can be helped to better understand, experience and regulate emotions, thereby improving their mental health.

4.2. Cultivating graduate students' sense of self-efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy was proposed by psychologist Albert Bandera and refers to an individual's confidence and belief in completing a specific task or overcoming a specific challenge. It is closely related to an individual's ability assessment and behavioral motivation. Self-efficacy reflects the extent to which a person believes he or she can succeed. Different from self-esteem or self-confidence, it is more focused on specific tasks or goals and is very important for actively coping with challenges, persisting in efforts, and achieving success^[9]. People with high self-efficacy are more likely to pursue goals and adapt to new situations, while people with low self-efficacy may be more likely to feel frustrated and give up. In actual work, mental health educators in colleges and universities can use a variety of methods to help improve graduate students' self-efficacy, for example: organizing graduate career planning workshops, guiding graduate students to formulate clear academic and career goals, and helping them formulate practical and feasible plans. , enhance the self-efficacy of graduate students by establishing small goals and gradually achieving them; invite outstanding graduate alumni to share their academic and professional experiences, inspire graduate students' confidence in the future, and convey the message of self-efficacy through their success stories; provide various Academic skills training courses enhance graduate students' professional skills and enhance their ability to cope with academic challenges; mentor recognition and support can significantly improve graduate students' self-efficacy, establish a sound mentor system, and provide personalized guidance and support to graduate students ; Encourage graduate students to participate in the academic community, strengthen communication with peers and mentors, share experiences and solve problems in the academic community, thereby increasing their academic self-confidence; establish an effective academic evaluation and feedback mechanism, and reward outstanding students through scholarships Publicize typical deeds and provide timely positive and specific feedback to graduate students to enhance their academic confidence. Through these methods, graduate students can be effectively promoted to face academic and career challenges more actively and confidently, and their self-efficacy can be improved.

4.3. Enhancing social support for graduate students:

Social support is crucial to the mental health of graduate students. The daily study life of graduate students is often accompanied by high-intensity academic pressure and career challenges, and these factors may have a negative impact on mental health. Therefore, it is important for graduate students to establish and maintain social support networks, including establishing close relationships with classmates, mentors, friends, and family, actively seeking support, and sharing emotions and experiences. Social support can help improve the mental health of graduate students and enable them to better cope with academic and career challenges^[10]. University educators can help graduate students improve their social support systems in many ways, such as organizing academic seminars, professional symposiums and networking gatherings to provide graduate students with opportunities to expand their social networks; conducting group meditation, yoga or psychological salons, etc. Mental health education activities not only help graduate students relieve stress, but also provide them with a social platform; improve the psychological resource library of university mental health education centers, which can include online resources, brochures and regular mental health activities to provide graduate students with what they can seek^[11]. A place for mental health information and support; offer social support training courses to teach graduate students how to proactively seek social support, express needs effectively and respond positively to others. By taking these approaches, graduate students can be helped to increase their levels of social support, thereby improving their mental health and overall quality of life.

5. Limitations of Positive Psychology Approaches

Positive psychology methods play an important role in improving the mental health of graduate students, but there are still some limitations, mainly in the following aspects:

5.1. Individual differences among graduate students

Individual graduate students will respond differently to positive psychology methods. Certain positive psychology methods may work for some students but not others^[12]. For example, some students whose native families are broken cannot obtain effective social support from family members. Therefore, positive psychology strategies need to be designed specifically to meet the needs of different graduate students.

5.2. Cultural and religious differences

China is a vast multi-ethnic country, and the graduate student population has different geographical, cultural and even religious differences. These differences will lead to different effectiveness of positive psychology methods. In actual application, colleges and universities Psychological center staff and counselors need to consider cultural sensitivity.

5.3. Academic pressure

Unlike undergraduate students, graduate students often face high-intensity academic pressure, which may make it difficult for them to find time and energy to participate in various positive psychology activities. This requires psychological teachers and counselors to sink into the students, take the initiative to understand their psychological needs and appeals^[13].

5.4. Inability to adapt to major setbacks

Positive psychology methods emphasize emotional regulation and coping with difficulties, but sometimes facing major setbacks, such as the death of a loved one, illness, natural disasters, car accidents, etc., deeper psychological support and intervention may be needed.

5.5. Serious mental health problems

For some graduate students, they may already have serious mental health problems when they enroll, such as severe depression or anxiety, and they may need professional psychotherapy and medical intervention.

5.6. Sustainability

Some positive psychology methods may require long-term maintenance to produce lasting effects. Graduate students often face short-term goals and time constraints, so it may be difficult to adhere to these methods in the long term.

In summary, positive psychology methods can improve the mental health of graduate students, but there are still some limitations, and individual differences, cultural differences and other factors need to be taken into consideration. Additionally, positive psychology approaches are often best used in conjunction with other mental health support strategies and professional treatments to ensure comprehensive support and intervention.

6. Research prospect

Positive psychology emphasizes human potential and happiness, and many studies have shown that positive psychology methods can effectively improve the mental health level of graduate students, promote their overall development, and improve their quality of life^{[14][15]}. In the future, the application of positive psychology in graduate mental health education can be explored from the following aspects.

6.1. Cultural adaptation research

Future research can further explore the application of positive psychology methods in different cultural backgrounds. Research can explore the effectiveness of these approaches in different cultures and how they can be adapted and customized to meet cultural differences.

6.2. Long-term effects research

More research could focus on the long-term effects of positive psychology methods. Understanding the persistence of these methods is important to determine their long-term impact on graduate student mental health.

6.3. Focus on considering individual differences

Research can focus more on individual differences, including gender, age, subject area, etc., to determine which methods are best for different types of graduate students^[16].

6.4. Interdisciplinary research

Positive psychology methods can be combined with other disciplines, such as education, sociology, and public health, to study and apply them more comprehensively.

6.5. Education and training

Future research could explore how to better train and educate educators to better teach positive psychology methods so that they can be widely used in graduate students.

6.6. Application of technological tools

Consider how to incorporate modern technological tools, such as apps and online resources, in order to disseminate positive psychology methods and provide support more widely^[17].

6.7. Academic and career guidance

Research can focus on how positive psychology approaches can be combined with academic and career guidance to help graduate students better achieve their academic and career goals.

6.8. Social support research

Further study the impact of social support on the mental health of graduate students, and explore how

to better promote positive social relationships.

The research in these directions is helpful to better apply positive psychology methods to improve the mental health level and overall quality of life of graduate students, and better meet their mental health needs.

7. Conclusion

The perspective of positive psychology provides a rich and useful framework for exploring mental health issues at the graduate level. This paper aims to gain insight into the common challenges of mental health for graduate students and explores how positive psychology approaches can be applied to promote their mental health and overall development. By reviewing the existing literature, this paper outlines the basic principles of mental health issues commonly faced by graduate students and positive psychology, and we are deeply aware of the challenges faced at the graduate level, while also seeing the potential of positive psychology approaches in this field.

The prevalence of mental health problems in graduate students forces us to realize that this is an issue that needs urgent attention and solution. Academic pressure, uncertain career prospects, financial worries, and social challenges all have a significant impact on the mental health of graduate students. However, the theories and methods of positive psychology provide us with a different perspective, emphasizing the importance of individual strengths, positive emotions, and self-efficacy, which can be used as resources to cope with challenges.

The positive psychology approach provides a variety of strategies for improving the mental health of graduate students. From promoting positive emotions and self-efficacy, to emphasizing social support and skill development for coping with stress, these approaches provide graduate students with practical tools and skills to help them better cope with stress in academia and life. However, we must also be aware that these methods will not be implemented overnight. To improve the mental health level of graduate students requires many efforts and resources. Universities and educational institutions need to establish a more integrated and sustainable mental health support system to provide more diverse and personalized support for graduate students.

In future studies, it is necessary to further explore the validity and applicability of positive psychology methods in graduate mental health education. In addition, we can further explore the characteristics of mental health problems of graduate students in different cultural backgrounds, and explore the corresponding intervention strategies. This will help provide more targeted support to different groups of graduate students.

In conclusion, this study aims to call attention to the mental health issues of graduate students and explore the application prospects of positive psychology methods in this field. Through focused research and practice, we can continuously explore more comprehensive and effective interventions to provide better mental health support for graduate students, help them better cope with academic and life challenges, and achieve all-round personal development and achievement.

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