

Dilemmas and Path Construction of University-Family-Society Collaboration in College Students' Mental Health Education

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Abstract: Mental health problems among college students have become increasingly prominent, and the traditional school-centered mental health education model can no longer meet the diverse psychological needs of students. The university-family-society collaborative mechanism is of great significance for integrating multi-party resources and improving the effectiveness of mental health education. At present, university-family-society collaboration is faced with practical dilemmas such as insufficient conceptual understanding, poor linkage effects, unbalanced goals, and lack of quality evaluation. Based on the ecosystem theory, the construction of the collaborative mechanism should follow the following paths: deepening the recognition of collaborative concepts, strengthening collaborative linkage effects, scientifically formulating collaborative goals, optimizing collaborative quality evaluation, consolidating the dominant position of schools in education, guiding families to exert their cornerstone functions, and activating the supportive role of society. By constructing an institutionalized, standardized, and long-term university-family-society collaborative mechanism, an all-round mental health support network can be formed to promote the mental health development of college students.

Keywords: College students' mental health education; University-family-society collaboration; Dilemmas; Path construction

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1. Introduction

The report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China points out that attention should be paid to mental health and mental hygiene, and the school-family-society education mechanism should be improved ^[1]. At present, mental health problems among college students are becoming more and more prominent, and the incidence of behavioral problems and mental illnesses is increasing year by year. *China National Mental Health Development Report (2021–2022)* shows that the detection rate of depression risk among college students reaches 24.1%, and the detection rate of anxiety symptoms is 35.6% ^[2]. As high-level

professional talents trained by the country, the mental health quality of college students is directly related to their ability to participate in and contribute to society in the future.

However, the traditional mental health education model for college students is dominated by school-based “one-way knowledge instillation,” with a single educational subject and limited educational effects. In April 2023, the Ministry of Education and 16 other departments jointly issued the *Special Action Plan for Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Students’ Mental Health Work in the New Era (2023–2025)*, which clearly states that mental health work should be placed in a more prominent position and focuses on promoting the collaboration and linkage of schools, families, society, and relevant departments. It can be seen that integrating the advantageous resources of all parties and forming an efficient and linked collaborative working mechanism is crucial to building a more holistic and long-term mental health work network for college students.

Based on the ecosystem theory, this study analyzes the practical dilemmas faced by university-family-society collaboration in current college students’ mental health education, and explores effective paths for constructing a university-family-society collaborative mechanism, so as to provide theoretical references and practical guidance for improving the effectiveness of college students’ mental health education.

2. Theoretical basis and value implications of university-family-society collaboration

2.1. Collaborative logic from the perspective of ecosystem theory

The ecosystem theory proposed by American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner holds that an individual’s psychological development is jointly affected by multiple subsystems in the growth environment, such as family, school, and society. These systems do not exist in isolation, but are nested and interact with each other. The microsystem most closely related to individuals consists of direct living environments such as family, school and peers; the mesosystem refers to the interaction between various microsystems, among which home-school collaboration is the most critical; the ecosystem does not directly affect individuals, but affects the development environment of various factors in the microsystem; the macrosystem refers to social culture, ideology and other factors, which affect individual psychological development in the long run.

From the perspective of ecosystem theory, college students’ mental health education requires the joint collaboration of family, school and society. Collaboration theory emphasizes the interaction and interdependence of various components of the system, giving play to their respective advantages to produce an overall effect of “one plus one is greater than two”. Therefore, the construction of the university-family-society collaborative mechanism is essentially based on the ecosystem theory, integrating multiple educational resources to form an all-round mental health education network.

2.2. Value implications of university-family-society collaboration

First, university-family-society collaboration helps to deal with the diverse and complex psychological problems of college students. Studies have shown that mental health problems among college students are becoming increasingly complex and diverse, covering academic pressure, interpersonal relationships, emotional distress, life adaptation, and other aspects, as well as frequent psychological crisis events. Only by breaking down the barriers between university, family, and society and making collaborative efforts can we help students effectively cope with complex and changing learning and life problems.

Second, university-family-society collaboration helps to improve the popularity and effectiveness of

mental health education. Problems such as unbalanced resource allocation and “information islands” have always been difficult problems in students’ psychological work. The university-family-society collaborative mechanism can break through limitations and improve the accessibility of psychological services by linking family, school, and social resources and sharing resources with each other.

Finally, university-family-society collaboration helps to improve the systematization and consistency of mental health education. The lack of communication among families, schools, and society in college students’ mental health education can easily lead to fragmented education. The collaborative mechanism helps to cover the whole process of psychological education, enabling college students to obtain effective and consistent psychological support in different environments ^[3].

3. Analysis of practical dilemmas in university-family-society collaboration

3.1. Insufficient understanding of collaborative concepts

In the university-family-society collaborative education model, families, schools, and society, as different educational subjects, undertake different educational tasks respectively, and the three should cooperate closely and complement each other. However, the current traditional concept holds that schools are the only place to carry out college students’ mental health education, so society and families gradually lose their right to speak ^[4]. From the school perspective, some parents believe that after their children enter university, the responsibility of education is completely transferred to the school, ignoring their important role in mental health education. From the social perspective, professional social institutions often only focus on people with obvious psychological problems, ignoring the general attention to the mental health of college students. It can be seen that the awareness of collaborative education among the three parties of university, family, and society is obviously insufficient at present, and there is a lack of necessary communication and linkage.

3.2. Poor collaborative linkage effect

In mental health education work, families, schools and society are fragmented and independent of each other. At the family level, different students have completely different family atmospheres, and parents adopt different educational methods for their children, while the mental health education activities carried out by families and their results are difficult to feed back to schools and society. At the school level, the main focus of mental health education in colleges and universities is on curriculum teaching and thematic activities, but its actual impact is difficult to spread to families and society. At the social level, the coverage of community psychological service institutions is limited, and their influence and public participation are not high. More importantly, the isolated efforts of a certain department often achieve little effect, and the lack of an effective collaboration framework among various resources leads to the fragmentation and discontinuity of psychological work ^[5].

3.3. Imbalance in collaborative goals

From the actual situation of the three parties of university, family, and society, their concepts and practical demands for college students’ mental health education are different, and educational goals are prone to imbalance. At the family level, some parents think that their children’s psychological problems are not serious, or choose to hide or even refuse to seek help due to a sense of stigma. At the school level, the goal of some colleges and universities to carry out mental health education is only to complete the assessment of higher authorities, and the concept of educating the mind and people has not been truly implemented. At the

social level, relevant institutions often take social stability as a consideration, with the goal of reducing the occurrence of crisis events. It can be seen that the goals of families, schools, and society are quite different, and they do not take the mental health development of college students as the core goal, which seriously restricts the implementation effect of collaborative education ^[6].

3.4. Lack of collaborative quality evaluation

In the actual process of carrying out college students' mental health education, scientific quality evaluation is needed to ensure the educational effect. However, at present, there are not many developments of educational quality evaluation tools in domestic colleges and universities. Most colleges and universities only limit the quality evaluation of mental health education to curriculum evaluation, and the evaluation criteria are not clear enough ^[4]. The construction of a quality evaluation system for the development of university-family-society collaborative work is insufficient, and the existing evaluation system is not systematic and comprehensive, making it difficult to scientifically evaluate and provide timely feedback on the collaborative effect, which has formed a major obstacle to the development of university-family-society collaborative work to promote college students' mental health education.

4. Path construction of the university-family-society collaborative mechanism

4.1. Deepening collaborative concepts and condensing educational consensus

Deepening the recognition of the collaborative concept among the three parties of university, family, and society is the primary premise for constructing the collaborative mechanism. A new pattern of collaborative education should be built with family education as the foundation, school education as the core, and social attention as a supplement.

At the family level, parents should establish a correct educational concept, strengthen communication and exchange with their children, and view their children's psychological problems objectively. Parents should take the initiative to collaborate with schools in education to promote the physical and mental health development of their children. At the school level, colleges and universities should scientifically plan and arrange college students' mental health education work, promote the development of activities related to mental health problems, and help college students master relevant psychological adjustment skills. At the social level, all sectors of society should make comprehensive efforts to enhance the breadth and depth of mental health education publicity, strive to improve the public's cognitive level of mental health, completely reverse the prejudice against psychological problems, eliminate stigmatization, and actively build a good social environment where the whole people pay attention to mental health and jointly pursue psychological harmony ^[7].

4.2. Strengthening linkage effects and integrating multi-party resources

Strengthening the collaborative linkage effect of university-family-society and promoting the sharing of educational resources among families, schools, and society is a key link in constructing the collaborative mechanism.

On the one hand, colleges and universities should establish a normalized home-school communication platform. A "home-school platform" can be established to invite parents to participate in thematic activities at school, help parents establish correct psychological concepts, and improve parents' ability to identify and intervene in their children's psychological problems through thematic lectures. On the other hand, colleges

and universities should effectively integrate with social psychological service institutions. Jointly build a mental health service platform with social institutions, integrate relevant resources for college students' mental health education, and realize multi-party resource sharing. As an important position for students' mental health adjustment, communities can organize a variety of psychological volunteer activities to help students master emotional regulation methods in service ^[7].

4.3. Scientifically formulating goals and clarifying the responsibilities of all parties

Scientifically formulating the collaborative goals of university-family-society is the basis for ensuring the effective operation of the collaborative mechanism. All parties should clarify their own rights and responsibilities, develop their strengths and make up for their weaknesses, and work together ^[8].

As the core of the collaborative mechanism, schools should give full play to their leading and organizing roles. Colleges and universities should use important groups such as counselors, psychological committee members, and information officers to timely and accurately understand the actual psychological changes of students and help students establish correct mental health concepts. As the "first guardians" of students, families should closely pay attention to students' psychological trends, accompany them to medical treatment when necessary, and actively cooperate with schools to formulate personalized intervention plans. Society should flexibly integrate all resources and information, supplement the deficiencies of family and school education, and create an open and inclusive psychological support atmosphere for students.

4.4. Optimizing the evaluation system and establishing a feedback closed loop

Improving the evaluation and feedback closed-loop mechanism is an inherent requirement for the long-term development of the university-family-society collaborative mechanism. Forming a closed-loop mechanism from problem early warning, information sharing, to plan implementation and effect evaluation is crucial for the continuous optimization of the collaborative mechanism ^[9].

First, a unified evaluation standard should be formulated, and the practical work results should be regularly evaluated around key indicators such as the coverage and effect of mental health work. Second, in the work process, all parties should unblock feedback channels, extensively collect ideas and opinions from students, parents, psychological teachers, social workers, etc., and discuss actual needs and difficulties through questionnaires, multi-party meetings, and other ways. Finally, after the evaluation, all parties should deeply analyze and summarize their own experience, actively adjust work content and methods, and at the same time institutionalize evaluation and feedback to form a virtuous circle of "reflection-improvement" ^[10].

5. Conclusion

College students' mental health education is a systematic project, and the traditional education model that solely relies on school mental health education can no longer meet the needs of college students' all-round development in the new era. The university-family-society collaborative mechanism is conducive to integrating family, school, and social resources, making up for the deficiencies of the traditional model, and building a balanced psychological support system. Based on the ecosystem theory, this study analyzes the practical dilemmas faced by current university-family-society collaboration, such as insufficient conceptual understanding, poor linkage effects, unbalanced goals, and lack of quality evaluation, and puts forward specific path construction strategies from four aspects: deepening collaborative concepts, strengthening

linkage effects, scientifically formulating goals, and optimizing the evaluation system.

The construction and improvement of the university-family-society collaborative mechanism is a long-term process, which requires condensing the collaborative educational forces of families, schools, and society, and constantly exploring and improving in practice ^[11]. In the future, research can further explore the application of digital technology in university-family-society collaboration, as well as the differentiated implementation strategies for different types of colleges and universities and college student groups, so as to provide a stronger guarantee for the mental health development of college students.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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