

An Analysis of the Development Trend of Psychological Problems Reflected by Social Media During the Epidemic

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Abstract: The outbreak and global spread of the novel coronavirus have brought huge impacts and changes to the lives and psychological states of all people. In particular, the young people in China are facing various challenges of psychological problems in this special period. The study aimed to explore the psychological problems reflected by Chinese adolescents on social media during the epidemic period and to analyze its development trend. By using relevant theories and methods of social psychology, collecting and analyzing a large amount of social media data, as well as combining questionnaires and interview surveys, this study attempts to deepen the understanding and attention of Chinese adolescents' mental health and put forward some innovative views and suggestions in this field.

Keywords: epidemic, Chinese youth, psychological problems, social media

1. Introduction

COVID-19 is an extremely contagious disease that has induced significant psychological distress among individuals worldwide. In accordance with stress theory and perceived risk theory, public health emergencies have the potential to elicit negative emotions in individuals, thereby influencing their cognitive evaluation. Prolonged negative emotions can compromise an individual's immune system and disrupt the equilibrium of normal physiological mechanisms.[1] Individuals may overreact to illness due to inadequate guidance from authorities, resulting in excessive avoidance behavior and blind compliance.[2]

The COVID-19 outbreak has caused people around the world to face major changes in their health and lifestyles. This has a huge impact on psychological conditions. Research into the introduction of social contact restrictions has found several unique patterns of associations between themes and emotions, with people's anxiety and sadness related to social contact restrictions, life during lockdown, infection-related topics, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on public and private life.[3] Especially in China, "We compared the differences in frequencies of LIWC word categories before and after lockdown and found that the number of word categories whose frequencies were significantly changed is more in Wuhan than in Lombardy." [4] The outbreak and the implementation of control measures have led to long hours of home isolation and online learning. This has had a profound impact on the adolescent population. The researcher confirms that mental health symptoms resulting from COVID-19 are significant.[5] During this special period, teenagers express psychological issues through social media platforms which also demonstrate certain characteristics and developmental trends. However, there is limited research available regarding the psychological

development characteristics and trends among Chinese adolescents during this epidemic context. This paper aims to review existing research literature while exploring the psychological trends reflected through social media amidst this epidemic situation; simultaneously gaining an extensive understanding of adolescent mental well-being during such times. It intends to provide suggestions for mental health education to society as well as help people better cope with the pressure and distress caused by the epidemic.

2. The Role of Social Media in the Pandemic

In the words of Moran, “the process of teaching and learning mediated by technologies, where teachers and students are separated spatially and/or temporally” is the best conceptualization of distance education.¹⁷ Distance education has been used effectively for focused training of HCWs, volunteers, and the community. Mass education may be effective through portals such as Twitter and YouTube.^[6]

The coronavirus lockdown has forced people to stay at home and use Internet media to stay informed about the outbreak and stay in touch with their families. A survey on social media platforms in Romania found that nearly nine out of 10 people receive information about the pandemic through at least one social media channel every day.^[7]

Some academics have based their research on the fact that Twitter has proved to be an efficient and widely used social tool during the coronavirus pandemic, with many users Posting a large number of messages during the pandemic.^[8] In the COV19Tweets data set, based on the study of large-scale data sets, some scholars found that the relevant content about the epidemic increased exponentially. Understanding these now publicly available data sets is helpful to better understand the current public sentiment about the epidemic.^[9]

Research based on the TikTok platform shows that analyzing videos shared on TikTok during the COVID-19 epidemic can be used to understand public psychology and public perception, with the majority of videos shared on the platform triggering humor/satire, 15% of videos triggering "fear" and 6% of videos triggering "empathy."^[10]

Among them, the use of social media has increased significantly for children and adolescents, with a study of teenagers in Kuantan City, Pahang State, showing that about 37.8% of teenagers spent more than four hours a day on social platforms before the lockdown, rising to 48.1% during the lockdown.^[11]

3. The Impact of the Epidemic on Mental Health

During a pandemic, public sentiment can be quickly generated and spread on social media. In the Wuhan lockdown incident, people's emotional development deteriorated at the beginning of the lockdown. Surveys on social media platforms have found that the emotional expression of real users is closely related to their gender, geographical location, and age,^[12]while there is a lack of classified research on teenagers. It is also related to the lack of age ratings on mainstream Chinese social media.

For adolescent students, due to long-term online classes at home, less time to exercise, more irregular sleep, and more unhealthy diet, resulting in weight gain, and cardiovascular endurance decline, when children are stuck at home, with no outdoor activities, no interaction with friends on the same screen, the negative impact on adolescent physical and mental health may be more serious.^[13]

According to a survey of Chinese students aged 12 to 18, the prevalence of depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and mixed symptoms of depression and anxiety among Chinese high school students during the COVID-19 epidemic was 43.7%, 37.4%, and 31.3%, respectively. This shows that the prevalence of mental health problems among young people in China during the epidemic is

very high, and we need to pay attention to the mental health problems of young people when we focus on the response to the epidemic and its impact.[14]

4. Psychological Problems Reflected Through Social Media

Although it is difficult to have a direct survey of the youth group from the data of China's mainstream social media platforms, we can still get some understanding of the psychological status of the youth, especially the Chinese youth, during the epidemic from the questionnaires and research reports in other countries

Sina Weibo, a social networking platform in China, is used by more than 462 million active daily users. Through the interaction among these users, some surveys have used computational predictive models to find that during the epidemic, people's positive emotions and life satisfaction scores decline, and negative emotions (such as depression, anxiety, and anger) and sensitivity to social risks increase. It reflects that the psychological condition of a considerable number of groups in China is deteriorating during this period of the epidemic.[15]

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5. The Research Results of Psychologists from Different Countries

To better understand the psychological status of young people during the epidemic, this study collected studies in this direction from other countries.

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Spanish scholars through the analysis of questionnaires and variable analysis, young people over 18 years old in the survey results show a higher degree of psychological distress.[17]

Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University analyzed the social media use of Turkish university students, showing that the use of social media by local university students is between 2.8% and 47%, and the use of social media by these youth is related to belonging and online self-expression and social support. The results showed that long-term social media use was significantly positively correlated with mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, stress, and insomnia.[18]

Especially for adolescents who are highly dependent on socializing with their peers, prolonged social isolation can have detrimental effects on their mental health. A Belgian study, based on emotion management theory, examined the relationship between adolescents' social media use and feelings of anxiety and loneliness during isolation and also showed that anxious participants used social media to cope with their feelings of loneliness and anxiety.[19]

6. Adolescent Mental Health Intervention Suggestions

Based on the above research summary, the overall psychological trend of adolescents is in a state of decline and deterioration during the containment of the epidemic, and some professional guidance and suggestions are needed to improve the psychological status.

Social communication is crucial for both individuals and adolescents, which is negatively related to positive emotional self-esteem and adjustment after negative experiences. During the pandemic, people can use social platforms to alleviate their sense of loneliness to a certain extent, increase their sense of belonging, and provide people with some social support. People can also respond to challenges by engaging in altruistic behaviors such as volunteering, donating money, and providing online social and emotional support to others.[20] Changes in the social media environment may have led to changes in the relationship between social media use and mental health since the outbreak in 2019. Authentic and comprehensive social media information and a healthy and positive social media environment can help improve the mental health of residents.[21]

To improve the learning health of youth and students and school effectiveness, innovative programs can motivate children to lead healthy lives at home by increasing physical activity, maintaining a balanced diet, regular sleep, and good personal hygiene.

When it comes to living and dealing with things, the community can serve as a valuable resource to help deal with difficulties in family affairs. For example, parent councils can work together to meet the school needs of students fight for their children's right to a healthy life, and safeguard students' learning needs.

Psychologists should provide online services to students to help them cope with mental health problems caused by family conflicts, strained relationships with parents, and anxiety about infection, as well as regularly report and document the psychological status of students even when they are offered help.

Schools not only play an important role in providing educational materials to children but also provide opportunities for students to interact with teachers and receive psychological support. Schools can actively promote health awareness, good personal hygiene, and mental health habits, and encourage students to set a schedule to reasonably plan their own time, set up Mental Health Month, and other related activities to let students and teachers pay attention to mental health.

At the same time, social media should also pay attention to the integrity and accuracy of the review mechanism, and the review of news and current affairs should be stricter and more perfect. For mental health and other issues, public service advertisements should also be actively publicized to attract people's attention. [22] [13][3]

7. Conclusion

This paper aims to review the research literature and explore the development trend of adolescent psychological problems in China under the background of the epidemic. At the same time, through an in-depth understanding of the psychological status of adolescents during the epidemic, mental health education and support suggestions are provided to society to help adolescents better cope with the pressure and distress brought by the epidemic. Based on this study, scholars should pay more attention to the psychological conditions of adolescents under the influence of major events such as lockdowns, conduct targeted treatment and comfort for the psychological problems of adolescents and other minority groups, and adopt more psychological investigation methods for adolescents. In the existing social psychology research, many scholars have conducted psychological research on the population in the context of the epidemic lockdown, but there is a lack of investigation and research progress on the specific psychological status of adolescents, especially Chinese adolescents. The study summed up the deteriorating psychological condition of people in the context of the COVID-19 lockdown in China. Through the survey results of the network media platform, it is further found that the psychological condition of teenagers is gradually deteriorating, and some relevant suggestions are put forward on how to alleviate the psychological problem.

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