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Interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance on emotional intelligence and mental health of college students

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to explore the role of interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance as potential moderator of the relationship between emotional intelligence and mental health of college students in China. The online survey platform "Questionnaire Star" was conducted among 367 undergraduates. The questionnaires of self-rated health measurement scale, emotional intelligence scale, interpersonal relationship assessment scale, and self-acceptance questionnaire was used for questionnaire survey and analysis. The self-rated health status was positively correlated with emotional intelligence and self-acceptance ($r=0.541$, 0.598, $p<0.01$), and negatively correlated with interpersonal relationships ($r=-0.609$, $p<0.01$). Further analysis using multivariate regression found that the interaction between emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance is statistically significant ($\beta=-0.02$, $p<0.05$), with the independent effect on health status is 0.7% ($\Delta R2=0.006$), and the negative effect of interpersonal relationship was the biggest ($\beta=-2.691$). Conclusion This study highlighted the psychological protection ability of self-rated health, which is influenced by interpersonal relationship, self-acceptance and emotional intelligence. Interpersonal relationship is the main factor that affects the emotional intelligence on self-rated health. Under the same conditions of emotional intelligence and self-acceptance, college students with good interpersonal relationship have better self-measured health status.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since December 2019, Wuhan, Hubei Province have witnessed a great increase in novel Coronavirus infections. With the rapid spread of the epidemic, other parts of China and overseas have also found such cases. On January 31, 2020, the novel coronavirus (2019-NCOV) outbreak was declared by world health organization (WHO) as a 'public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC)' [1], [2]. Henan Province is south adjacent to Hubei Province, with the shortest distance of only 170 km to Wuhan, so the situation of epidemic prevention and control was severe and complex. For the sake of overall interests and minimise the risk of infection, both urban and rural areas have implemented all-round traffic control and epidemic prevention: businesses were shuttered, shops were closed and school returns were delayed [3].

College students is a special group during the epidemic period, they not only have to face the confusion that it is still difficult to determine when the epidemic will end, but also have to endure the panic

caused by mixed online information or even rumors. College students have to endure the anxiety of staying at home for a long time because they cannot confirm the time of returning to school, which makes them prone to various mental problems, such as anxiety, depression, panic, and loneliness. Hence these mental problems would further cause undesirable physical symptoms, including difficulty concentrating, memory loss and even body aches and pains [4]–[7].

It is well known that a good mental health status of college students is indispensable in the construction of safe campus as well as harmonious society. The expansion of horizons and experiences increase college students' demand for understanding from parents, teachers, and peers. Therefore, smooth interpersonal communication is an integral component of good mental health. In addition, the scope of college students' interpersonal communication is also affected by their self-awareness [8], [9]. With the rapid change of college life compared with before, students who are difficult to adapt to this process may become indifferent, and are prone to occur mental health disorders such as psychological distortion, paranoia, dual and multiple personality [10], [11].

The mental health of college students is affected by a number of factors, including the regional environment, language and customs, growing environment caused by one child policy, the degree of participation in campus activities, whether in love, living habits, and so on [12], [13]. University time is a significant stage for the formation and development of college students' interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance, which directly impact their mental health [14], [15], reflected in rational handling of affairs and the establishment of harmonious interpersonal relationship.

In this study, the researcher intended to analyze the relationship among self-rated health status, interpersonal relationship, emotional intelligence and self-acceptance of college students. Additionally, the researcher aimed to explore the role of interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance as the potential moderators on the relationship between emotional intelligence and health status.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

In May 2020, researchers conducted an investigation through online platform name "Questionnaire Star". A total of 367 college students in Henan Province were chosen through cluster sampling to participate in this study. There were 88 (24.0%) male students and 279 (76.0%) female students. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 24, with an average age of 20.

2.1. Instrument

2.2.1. Self-rated health measurement scale (SRHMS)

The self-rated health measurement scale (SRHMS) was used to measure the health status of college students [16]. There were 48 items from three dimensions: physical health, mental health and social health compose the scale. A total score for health status was calculated for each participant by summing up all there domain score. Higher scores indicate better health status of the participants. For this scale, the Cronbach's α coefficient of the scale was 0.939.

2.2.2. Emotional intelligence scale in Chinese version (WLEIS)

There are 16 items in the Wong and Law emotional intelligence scale (WLEIS) with 4 dimensions [17]: self-emotional evaluation, others' emotional evaluation, emotional use and emotional management. Participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree". A total score was calculated, and higher score indicates higher emotional intelligence level. For this scale, the Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.890.

2.2.3. Interpersonal relationship integrative diagnostic scale

The comprehensive diagnostic scale [18] of interpersonal relationship was used to investigate the interpersonal relationship troubles of college students. It consisted of 28 items; including four dimensions of conversation behavior, communication and making friends, interpersonal contact and heterosexual contact, and the score of each item is 0 or 1. The higher score indicates more serious interpersonal distress degree, and each dimension is no less than three points, which indicates that there is trouble in this dimension. For this scale, the Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.891.

2.2.4. Self-acceptance questionnaire

This questionnaire was compiled by Zhong and Wenfeng [19] in 1999. There were 16 items in total, and each item was rated at 4 levels, including self-acceptance and self-evaluation. The total score of the scale was between 16 and 64 points, and the factor score was between 8 and 32 points Higher total score in this scale indicated higher levels of self-acceptance. For this scale, the Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.834.

2.2. Statistical analysis method

The statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) 18.0 software was used to deal with all the data. By the methods of skew and kurtosis to test measurement data, the results are approximately normal distribution. Pearson correlation analysis and multivariate regression analysis were used to analyse the relationship between variables. It was considered with statistical significance when p-value is less than 0.05.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The score of self-acceptance of college students in love was higher than that of non-love college students ($p<0.05$), but the score of interpersonal relationship was lower than that of non-love college students ($p<0.01$). The emotional intelligence score of only child college students was higher than that of non-only child college students ($p<0.01$). College students from different places of origin occurred difference in emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance ($p<0.05$). Pairwise comparison indicated that the emotional intelligence and self-acceptance of urban college students were higher than those of rural college students, and the interpersonal relationship score of urban college students was lower than that of rural college students ($p<0.05$). The scores of self-rated health, psychological capital, interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance of college students with different weekly exercise status were different ($p<0.001$). Further pairwise comparison showed that the scores of self-rated health, psychological capital and self-acceptance of college students without exercise were lower than those of other groups of college students who participated in exercise ($p<0.01$). The score of interpersonal relationship was higher than that of other groups ($p<0.01$). Table 1 reveals the details information.

Table 1. Associations of college students' self-rated health, emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance with demographic variables ($\chi 2 \pm s$)

Variable	n	Self-rated health	Emotional intelligence	Interpersonal relationship	Self-acceptance
Love					
Yes	79	340.18±43.42	46.13±5.21	5.36±5.71	41.82±5.51
No	288	334.41±44.91	44.92±5.09	7.58±5.41	40.37±5.87
t		1.018	1.85	-3.166**	1.971*
Having siblings					
No	61	342.56±44.09	46.70±5.18	6.05±5.30	41.85±5.29
Yes	306	334.27±44.64	44.88±5.08	7.31±5.58	40.45±5.90
t		1.326	2.558*	-1.623	1.722
Birthplace					
Urban	104	338.42±45.90	46.39±4.69	5.73±5.01	41.16±5.61
Suburban	41	342.34±43.23	45.02±5.94	5.43±4.19	42.37±6.52
Rural	222	333.12±44.60	44.64±5.09	8.04±5.80	40.15±5.73
F		1.021	4.216*	8.454***	3.038*
Every week sports					
>5 times	35	354.83±37.70	47.91±6.16	4.89±4.91	42.69±7.15
3~4 times	53	341.26±45.19	46.19±4.31	5.42±4.91	42.81±5.61
1~2 times	67	341.90±41.76	45.54±4.18	6.61±4.65	41.24±4.68
occasionally	153	335.41±45.05	44.92±4.85	7.53±5.67	40.48±5.66
none	59	312.78±41.92	42.95±5.91	9.48±6.15	37.49±5.41
F		6.392***	6.318***	5.866***	8.017***

*p<0.05，**p< 0.01, ***p< 0.001

Self-measured health was positively correlated with emotional intelligence and self-acceptance through Pearson correlation analysis ($r=0.541$, 0.598, $p<0.01$). The self-rated health was negatively correlated with interpersonal relationship ($r=-0.609$, $p<0.01$). Table 2 shows the details information.

Table 3 disrcibes the moderating effects of the three variable models. In model 1, emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance had an effect on self-measured health, explaining 50.4% of the total variation of self-measured health score. Among them, emotional intelligence and self-acceptance had a positive effect on self-rated health (β=2.687,1.564), while interpersonal relationship had a negative effect (β=-2.800). In the bidirectional interaction model 2, there is no interaction between emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance. However, in the three-variable interaction model 3, the interaction of emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance was statistically significant (β=-0.021, $p<0.05$), and the independent effect on self-rated health was 0.6%, among which interpersonal relationship had the largest negative effect (β=-2.691).

Table 2. Pearson correlations between college students' self-rated health, emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance (n=367)

Variable	M	SD	Self-rated health	Emotional intelligence	Interpersonal relationship	Self-acceptance
Self-rated health	335.65	44.60	1			
Emotional intelligence	45.18	5.13	0.541**	1		
Interpersonal relationship	7.10	5.54	- 0.609**	- 0.418**	1	
Self-acceptance	40.68	5.82	0.598**	0.525**	- 0.639**	1

**p<0.01.

Table 3. Effect of college students' emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance on self-rated health

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
		p-value		p-value		p-value
Emotional intelligence	2.687	<0.001	2.819	<0.001	2.283	<0.001
Interpersonal relationship	-2.800	<0.001	-2.791	<0.001	-2.691	<0.001
Self-acceptance	1.564	<0.001	1.594	<0.001	1.416	0.001
Emotional intelligence×Interpersonal relationship			-0.118	>0.05	-0.202	0.015
Emotional intelligence×Self-acceptance			-0.072	>0.05	-0.132	>0.05
Interpersonal relationship×Self-acceptance			0.053	>0.05	0.028	>0.05
Emotional intelligence×Interpersonal relationship×Self-acceptance					-0.021	0.039
Adjusted R^2	0.504		0.505		0.509	
ΔR^2	0.508	<0.001	0.004	>0.05	0.006	0.039

In order to intuitively show the influence of emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance on self-rated health, we further constructed a three-variable interaction diagram of self-rated health based on the method described by Dawson and Richter as shown in Figure 1 [20]. It is indicated in Figure 1 that the self-rated health level of college students with high interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance decreased with the increase of emotional intelligence, which was different from the other three groups ($p<0.05$). The self-rated health level of college students with high interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance increased with the increase of emotional intelligence. With the same level of emotional intelligence, the self-rated health level of college students with low interpersonal relationship is better, while the self-rated health level of college students with low interpersonal relationship and high self-acceptance is the best.

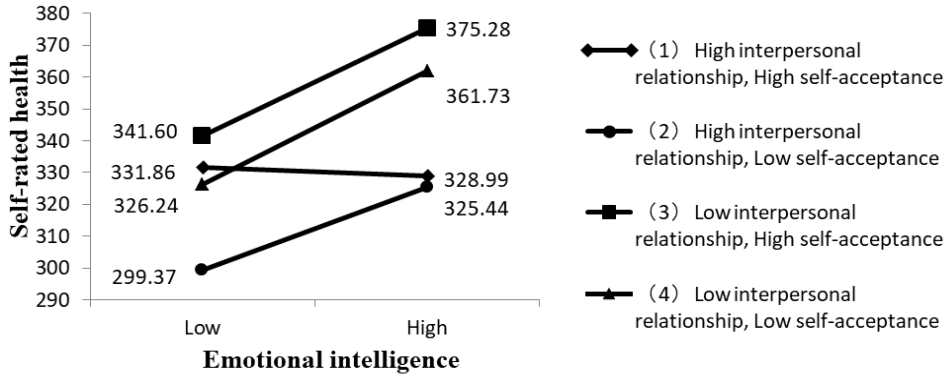

Figure 1. Interaction of emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance in self-rated health

3.1. The relationship among college students' self-rated health, emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance

Emotional intelligence refers to individuals' capacity to properly perceive, understand and process emotions of themselves and people around them, in order to better regulate behavior's and solve problems in work and life. The only child family is relatively better, they can receive better social resources and show good emotional intelligence. The level of economic development, education and other social resources in

cities are better than those in rural areas. Therefore, urban children receive higher education and other quality training than rural children, and they have clearer self-recognition and stronger interpersonal skills.

College is also the beginning of love in life. College students who are good at interpersonal relations and aggressive are more likely to fall in love. Studies have shown that the better the interpersonal relationship, the higher the love forgiveness ability, so the longer the love will be [21]. It is verified by scientists that the physical activity is beneficial for not only physical health, but also mental health of college students [22]. This survey suggests that college students who regularly take part in physical exercise can promote interpersonal relationship, enhance self-recognition, increase problem-solving skills, and show a good level of mental health. The self-rated health and emotional intelligence of college students are positively correlated with self-acceptance, and negatively correlated with interpersonal distress, indicating that the higher the level of emotional intelligence of college students is, the more correctly they can recognize themselves, so as to maintain good interpersonal relationship and optimistic emotional perception and understanding.

3.2. The interaction of emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationship, and self-acceptance on self-rated health status

Emotional intelligence is an important factor which affects individuals' mental health status, and even determines their success to a large extent. A person with stronger emotional regulation ability can ease stress and stabilize psychological state more easily [23], [24]. Self-acceptance means that individuals can accept themselves when they meet various situations in real life, learn themselves properly and have self-knowledge, which is a positive and enterprising attitude towards themselves and their characteristics. High score of self-acceptance indicates that individuals can accept themselves, understand themselves appropriately, when encountering various situations in reality. With clear self-knowledge, they can maintain towards themselves and their own specialty. Individuals with clear self-cognition will make relatively correct evaluation in the face of difficulties, and they can overcome difficulties and achieve success in the face of challenges combined with good interpersonal relationships [25]. This study shows that under different emotional intelligence states, college students with high self-acceptance and good interpersonal relationship always have better self-rated health level.

Interpersonal relationship is a psychological relationship established through communication and interaction between people in essence [26]. It is an important aspect of human sociality and an important reflection of human belonging needs [27]. The interaction results show that interpersonal relationship is the main factor influencing the level of self-rated health, when college students are troubled by interpersonal relationship problems, even with better self-recognition, it would still negatively affect their self-rated health [28], [29]. Under the same condition of emotional intelligence and self-acceptance, college students with good interpersonal relationship had better self-rated health. When individuals have better self-cognition in the process of growth, they are better at interpersonal communication in the face of life events, which is manifested as a more positive and optimistic mood, in order to promote the health level of individuals [30].

The result of this study can be helpful to enhance the psychological protection ability and anti-stress ability of college students, so as to provide reasonable suggestions and implementation approaches to help them get rid of unhealthy psychological barriers, learn and grow in a friendly and happy spiritual environment, and establish a correct worldview, outlook on life and values. The limitations of this study are as following. Firstly, since this survey was a cross-sectional study, it is difficult to make causal inferences about the relationship between the examined factors and self-rated health. Secondly, there is a certain degree of deviation because the sample size is relatively small. However, these findings merit further investigation with larger sample size.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the effects of emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationship and self-acceptance on health of college students in China during the pandemic of COVID-19 were explored in this study. It demonstrated that the self-acceptance was a major factor positively associating with the health of college students. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate their self-acceptance ability to promote the health, especially contributes to keep college students mentally healthy and flourished under the current normalized situation of epidemic prevention and control. The findings provide knowledge for the government officers and educational administrators on how to better implement mental health education on college students.

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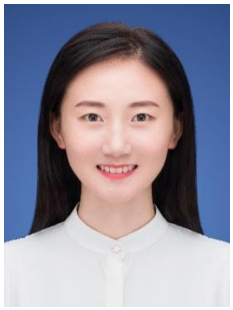

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