Research on Causing Factors and Countermeasures to Postgraduates’ Psychological Problems

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Abstract - Though postgraduates are all highly-educated with advanced degrees, yet they tend to have similar psychological problems as most undergraduates have. However, being a relatively independent group postgraduates are characterized by some unique psychological features. Issues such as academic research, job-hunting, interpersonal relationship, financial burden, love and marriage often make postgraduates fall into psychological crisis. Therefore, it is indispensible to investigate these problems and have a thorough analysis of postgraduates’ living environments. Based on a case study, this paper mainly analyses the causing factors of postgraduates’ psychological problems, aiming to propose feasible and possible countermeasures to tackle them. It begins with a problematic postgraduate as a study case who reveals some representative psychological problems postgraduates are facing now. Then it tries to analyse the relevant causing factors resulting in postgraduates’ psychological problems. Finally, the author of this paper proposes five feasible countermeasures to improve postgraduates’ mental health.

Index Terms - Postgraduates, Psychological problems, Causing factors, Countermeasures.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the number of postgraduates is increasing rapidly due to the expanding of postgraduates’ enrollment [1]. Postgraduates’ mental health has been an extremely significant part of graduates’ comprehensive quality [2]. Being influenced by social environment and inner world, postgraduates are likely to confront psychological crisis caused by problems in interpersonal relationship, academic study, self-knowledge, self-development, love and marriage, etc [3]. Therefore, making a correct analysis of these issues and taking necessary countermeasures are indispensible to improve the mental health of postgraduates. This paper is based on a case study attempting to make due contributions to the practice of mental health education for postgraduates.

2. Case Briefing

Zhang Lei (pseudonym), male, second-year postgraduate at a university located in the Northwest of China. He was born in a farmer’s family with four people. It is known from his father that Zhang Lei was paranoid, radical and cynical since he was young. He was easily tempered and held criticism and prejudices toward contemporary educational and testing system. To the contrary, Zhang Lei worked very hard at school and did very well in all the courses. He was once awarded “excellent student”, “excellent league member” when he was at high school. While he was at university, he had difficulty in getting along with his roommates and was once discouraged by his father when he tried to pursue a girl. When he got the admission from graduate school, he didn’t carefully complete his thesis for bachelor degree and received severe criticism from college officials because of that.

While he was in the graduate school, he never changed his paranoid and radical personality when he dealt with people around him. He was always self-centered and had an unhealthy living habit. He had unhappy relationships with his schoolmates. He usually held a negative attitude to love, marriage, family life, career prospect and philosophy of life by saying that, “Life is full a sorrows, people are so insignificant.” He even didn’t realize his friends’ responses “Never call me any longer and never disturb me any longer.” is meant to refuse him. Though joint-efforts both from teachers and his parents constantly help him overcome his psychological problems, he still broke into girls’ dormitories with a knife and damaged many properties, which resulted in severe conflicts between him and other students. Finally, he was taken away by the police and was penalized by school officials. It is surprisingly that once he was separated from the influence of the girl he loved, he immediately turned to be polite and gentle. After a series of diagnosis by doctors from the Fourth Military Medical University and First Affiliated Hospital of Medical College of Xi’an Jiaotong University, Zhang Lei was diagnosed to have a psychological problem of impulse control disorders.

What contribute to Zhang Lei’s unusual behavior? The author of this paper tends to attribute Zhang Lei’s psychological problems to the following five causing factors.

3. A tentative probe into causing factors of postgraduates’ psychological problem

A. Absence of family education

As far as family education is concerned, many parents only keep a check on children’s test-taking abilities, and overdoing that usually poses heavy stress to children’s psychological health, which is harmful to children’s grow-up and results in their character shortcomings. In contemporary China, many children grow up beside their parents while live independently from their parents after going for bachelor degree at university. With a heavy learning environment and living difficulty, and being short of self-discipline and adjustment, they usually face great pressure in their inner world and this would turn into psychological crisis later in postgraduate period.
B. Economic and emotional stress

According to the current educational system, postgraduate education doesn’t belong to the compulsory education in China. Therefore, postgraduate education requires a lot of tuition fees which are unbearable for a student who comes from a farmer’s family. Zhang Lei’s father is an average person who earns his living by making shoes. It is known that Zhang Lei’s tuition fees and general expenses coming from his father’s hard labor. While most of Zhang Lei’s friends not only buy an apartment and car, but also get married, this huge gap causes marriageable Zhang Lei to face great emotional frustrations. Meanwhile, enormous academic pressure and life distress make him lose courage to pursue a girl and finally lead to his psychological problems.

C. The gap between ambition and reality

He believes that it may be a historic leap from undergraduate learning to postgraduate study, which will bring about a dramatic change to his life. In the perspective of psychology, the higher the expectation is, the poorer the mental health is. In other word, preparing the entrance examination of graduate school, he needs to devote a lot in order to get a success. In such a context, he will naturally have a very high expectation on graduate study. In addition, Zhang Lei was born in a village where villagers all place high hope on him because he was regarded as an excellent example for his followers. In this regard, he also faces a psychological stress. However, the job market in China now is very challenging so that many graduates could not get promising job which makes him feel unbalanced between pains and gains. When he could not find proper position in society, he would start to complain his parents and even take revenge on society.

D. Imperfection of college mental health education and parents’ wrong perceptions

University offers higher education which plays a key role in shaping students’ mentality. Zhang Lei’s abnormal behavior has already won teachers’ attention. While he turns to be so severe may have something direct to do with the college mental health education system. Additionally, his parents are inescapable from his due responsibilities. Teachers have already informed his parents his abnormal behaviors several times and advised them to take Zhang Lei to see a doctor. But his parents confused psychological problem with mental disorder, insisting that his son was out of problem. Their wrong perception of mental health leads to aggravation of Zhang Lei’s mental health situation.

E. Personal factors

Of all the causing factors, personal factors play a dominant role in resulting in psychological problem. In general, personal factors include cognitive ability, emotion and feeling, will and personality, etc. At present, many postgraduates have to face a very competitive academic pressure, financial burden, family stress and the pressure of public opinion. These stress mingled together to result in graduates’ deficiency of human spirit and personality. Therefore, it is of great importance to build a positive psychological state, develop a good sense of self-discipline, and improve their anti-frustration ability and interpersonal skills.

Zhang Lei’s psychological problem is warning us that the management should always keep an eye on students’ psychological health and find out those who are facing psychological crisis. By doing this, we can take feasible and possible countermeasures to help them get out of psychological problems.

4. Countermeasures and Solutions

A. Establishing mental health diagnosis and remedial system

We need further intensify and pay close attention to the mental health education for postgraduates, and diagnose the state of their mental health. Meanwhile, we should conduct extensive observation on postgraduates’ psychological health and carry out corresponding measures such as psychological tests, psychological counseling and psychological tutoring. To be specific, we can hold psychological lectures to first-year postgraduates, offer professional knowledge to second-year postgraduates, provide guidelines on job-hunting and further study to third-year postgraduates. Encouraging graduates to maintain a positive attitude while get along with people around them [4].

B. Constructing an efficient mental health education system

It is necessary to build up a complete psychological health education system. First, it is advisable to establish a professional organization with specialized professional to offer psychological health education at the college level. Second, supervisors and students’ counselors need to assume the due responsibilities of practicing the specific measures remedying graduates’ psychological problems at the school level. Third, training class leaders and some students to find out and offer initial instant help to students who are in poor psychological health.

C. Improving postgraduates employment rate

Facing the surplus of talented people, postgraduates are no longer competed by employers. Meanwhile, postgraduates’ extremely high aspiration is the main obstacle that reduces the opportunities of job-hunting. In such a situation, we need to take measures in the following two aspects. First, it is possible to launch supervisor contract responsibility system to help postgraduates find job opportunities. By doing this, supervisors need to learn more about employment policy, and actively make use of their own social resources to create more employment opportunities. Secondly, it is feasible to extend and diversify the modes of internship for students, which would help change postgraduates’ concept of employment that usually focusing on government or public institution.
D. Raising public awareness on postgraduates’ mental health

We need to call on public awareness to pay close attention on postgraduates’ psychological health. Educators should attach great importance to postgraduates’ psychological education by setting up special fund to financially support psychological education. Moreover, we need to intensify research on postgraduates’ psychological education by founding psychological research center at all levels [5]. Last but not least, we need to build a cooperative relationship with postgraduates’ parents to help parents find their children’s psychological problems as early as possible and take immediate measures to remedy psychological crisis.

E. Emphasizing mental health education in ideological and political education

Higher education plays a key role in shaping students’ philosophy of life, value of life and world outlook. If psychological education is absent from higher education, it would be difficult to produce well-qualified graduates. The former president Hu Jintao launched, “Eight Do's and Eight Don'ts”, which claims that “Love, do not harm the motherland. Serve, don't disserve the people. Uphold science; don't be ignorant and unenlightened. Work hard; don't be lazy and hate work. Be united and help each other; don't gain benefits at the expense of others. Be honest and trustworthy, not profit-mongering at the expense of your values. Be disciplined and law-abiding instead of chaotic and lawless. Know plain living and hard struggle; do not wallow in luxuries and pleasures.” This should be the correct philosophy of life, value of life and world outlook for postgraduate. Therefore, teachers should put more emphasis on postgraduates’ psychological education in ideological and political class. Meanwhile, we should also take postgraduates’ individual personality into consideration while trying to carry out psychological education. Only in this way can we achieve effective results in psychological education.

A Chinese researcher, Ma Jianqing, suggests that we should have a correct understanding and scientific research on graduates’ psychological health [6]. In other word, research on postgraduates’ psychological health is still insufficient and there is much research room for further study.

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