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Effects of Psychological Therapy in Improving the Conditions of Depressed College Students in China

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Abstract: *Aim:* Chinese college students have a high incidence of depression, which can cause symptoms such as despair and disappointment and affect their academic performance. Psychological therapy can cultivate good behavior and help students live a positive life. This study aims to explore the impact of psychological therapy on depression among Chinese college students and suggest that universities strengthen the awareness and popularization of psychological therapy.Depression is a common and serious psychological disorder among Chinese students, related to changes in lifestyle and academic pressure, which can lead to social isolation and affect academic and growth. Multiple psychological therapies are needed to cope with it. *Literature Review:* Psychotherapy helps college students to deal with these challenges. The study developed research questions and objectives that have served as a guide on making the study a success. *Methodology:* Using descriptive design to collect raw data, obtaining information through questionnaire surveys, and conducting quantitative statistical analysis using SPSS software. *Results:* Most students are aware of the importance of psychotherapy but do not take it seriously. Even though universities have many psychotherapy centers, there are still many students with high levels of depression. Therefore, it is recommended that universities enhance students' awareness of psychotherapy.
Keywords: chinese college students; psychotherapy; depressive symptoms

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1. Study background and rationale

1.1. Study background

Psychotherapy, derived from the Greek words psyche (spirit/soul) and therapeia (treatment), is a social intervention involving one-on-one interaction to address mental health issues [1]. Since the 1950s, approaches like behavioral, humanistic, and cognitive therapy have evolved to improve human behavior and well-being[2]. Depression among college students causes significant physical, social, and behavioral problems, negatively impacting mood, thoughts, and societal functioning[3,4]. Without intervention, students struggle to cope with daily stressors. This study aims to explore how psychotherapy can help students manage these challenges, thereby enhancing their overall well-being and future prospects.

1.2. Research rationale

Chinese university students often face a mental disorder commonly known as depression. This is the cause why students

in these universities have low self esteem that may lead to suicidal tendencies. Both the academic career and other future accomplishments get hampered due to this mental disorder. Several studies have shown that depression among students in these Chinese universities are relatively higher. Different factors like study pressure, employment pressure, changes in lifestyle and residence are responsible for this mental disorder.

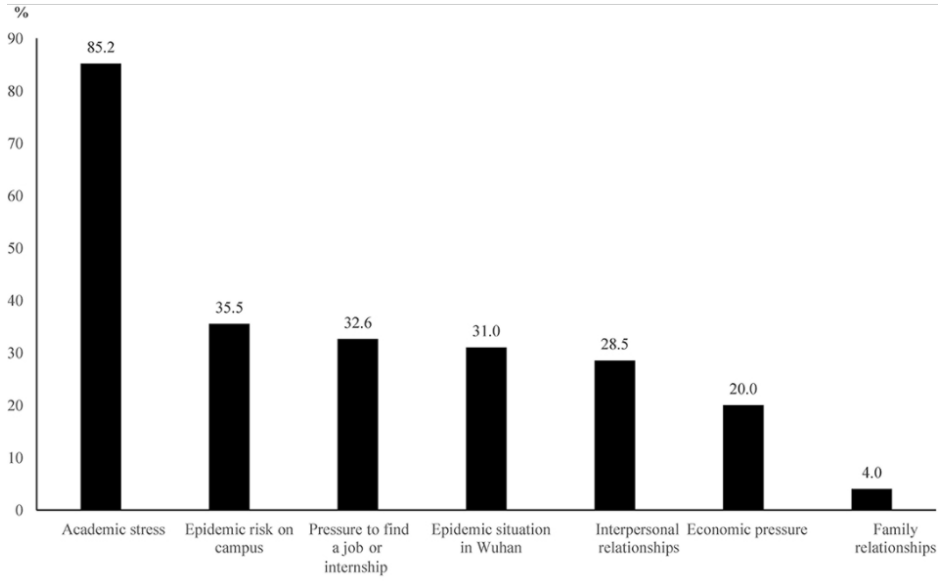

Figure 1. several reasons for depression
(Source: frontiersin.org 2021)[5].

A 2020 survey of Chinese middle and high school students found 44% with depression, 37% with anxiety, and over 30% suffering from both, while mental health issues among university students often go untreated due to family ignorance and institutional inaction, leading to isolation, suicidal attempts, and poor academic performance, and with only one in three mentally impaired children receiving proper care, psychological support and increased awareness being essential to improve students' well-being and future prospects.

1.3. Research aim

The aim of this research topic is to identify and highlight the potential problems that depressed students in Chinese universities face. The methods and procedures used in this research paper will help the readers to analyze the significance of several psychological programs designed to help such students. The different suggestions offered by this paper is expected to motivate the college students.

2. Impacts of psychotherapy and college students' mental health challenges

2.1. Impacts of group psychotherapy

On effects of group psychotherapy[6], this review majored to identify the depressive symptomatology among college students. As a result, the students who attended group organizations that met various psychotherapy credentials were seen to make a composition of those students who were comfortable with their life at colleges and those who achieved the best results. Group therapy improves self-esteem, resulting in many students knowing themselves and accepting their whole beings, which makes them comfortable with the general affairs they are supposed to cater to them in their general well-being. Social adaptation played a significant role in the whole being of the students.

2.2. Psychotherapy and its implications on students

Additionally, mental health issues result in a poor judgment for students, and then. As a result, students do not get in an excellent position to manage their school life [7]. Similarly, students find it hard to maintain a healthy balance between their studies and their public lives. Mental health issues in students causing campus dropouts, poor grades, and damaged relationships among students and with stakeholders, proper diagnosis and resources being helpful but most students lacking awareness of psychotherapy's purpose and services, researchers recommending mass education to boost understanding.

2.3. Challenging college life

College life is full of challenges[8]. As for upcoming young adults, they face many challenges in their lives that cross over to the edge of future parents. College students facing financial stress, substance abuse, biological changes, and social challenges that often trigger depression and anxiety, with financial insecurity, fashion-related pressures, and academic stress leading to harmful coping behaviors, body dissatisfaction and sleep problems like insomnia further exacerbating mental health issues, and effective interventions including sleep hygiene, mindfulness, and especially CBT combined with relaxation techniques.

2.4. Mindfulness in improving mental health conditions

A review by Kingston et al. [9] on mindfulness playing a significant role in improving student mental health conditions, comparing the values and self-practices of mindfulness to find a certain degree of correlation, indicating significant benefits for college students practicing mindfulness, that mindfulness instills proper values to transform their character and reduce mental health issues, recommending colleges to promote mindfulness and encourage students to practice self-acceptance and active participation for better mental health.

2.5. Limited psychotherapy centres

Psychotherapy centers are often underresourced, limiting their ability to meet student needs despite high demand[10]. The discipline lacks sufficient recognition, further hindering service quality. This aligns with Linardon et al.[11], who note that limited facilities prevent many from accessing proper treatment. The review recommends internet and app-based solutions to address these gaps and reduce depression and other mental health issues.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research approach

The researcher has used a deductive approach in this case as the main focus of the study has been based on developing and proving hypotheses on existing theories (Woiceshyn and Daellenbach, 2018). In this case, the researcher has focused on analysing the effect of therapy on depressed Chinese students, which can be further generalised towards the entire adolescent population of the country.

3.2. Research design

Research design is focused on determining the entire blueprint of research based on the objectives. In this case, the researcher has used a descriptive design, which is focused on detailed observation and identification of selected variables in a problem scenario (Siedlecki, 2020). Descriptive research design is mainly valuable to social research as it defines as well as interprets a social scenario without any intervention. The researcher has used this design in this case to identify the current conditions of depressed students among college students across China.

3.3. Data collection

Data Collection techniques can be described as the process of collecting information from the identified population of the

study. Focused on collecting primary quantitative data from participants aligning with the chosen philosophy and research design, the researcher used a structured online survey questionnaire containing 14 questions divided into three sections: the first five focused on demographic data, the next five on participants' awareness of psychological therapy, and the last four on their attitude towards it, with the last two sections using a Likert-type scale for data collection.

3.4. Sampling methods and recruitment

Sampling techniques are described as the process of selecting participants from the population. The researcher has used a convenience sampling method, in this case, to approach participants through social media. In terms of recruitment, the researcher has focused on approaching college students arranged from 16 to 30 years. The researcher has reached out to different groups of Chinese colleges and approached them to participate in the study. The researcher has collected data from 51 participants in this case.

3.5. Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations of research focus on maintaining the human and intellectual rights of a study's sampling elements, with the researcher having collected primary data in this regard by using an online informed consent form to access permission from participants beforehand that provides a detailed description of the study's purpose and participants' rights in this procedure. The study used codes to identify participants such as R1 for respondent one and R2 for respondent two instead of their actual names to guarantee privacy, with no person forced to participate and any person having the power to withdraw before the study's end without needing to provide reasons.

4. Data analysis and results

4.1. Frequency analysis

Frequency analysis on all 14 questions in the research questionnaire provides a detailed overview of data distribution across all three different questionnaire sections, with demographic results showing 28% of participants aged 24, 58% female, 32% university graduates, and 60% from middle socio-economic backgrounds—a segment of Chinese society prevalent on social media and aligning with the research's data collection method—while the questionnaire's next section focusing on participants' self-reported psychological well-being offers a broad overview of Chinese college students' mental health status.

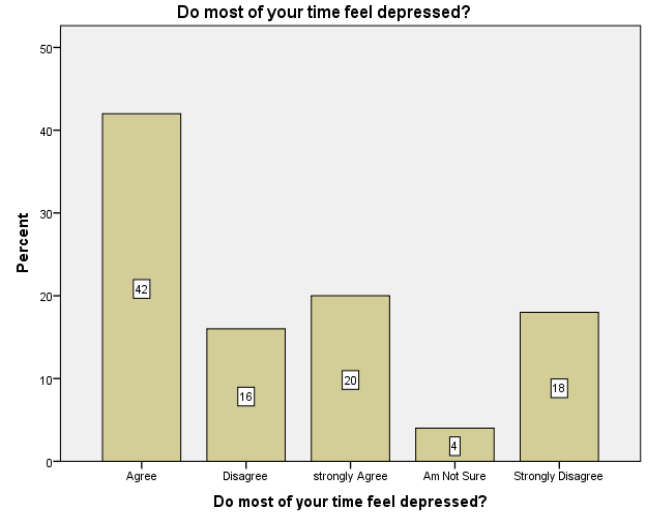

Figure 4.1. Level of depression among Chinese college students

This section's first question has focused on determining the level of depressive tendencies among Chinese college students, with 42% of total participants agreeing they have depressive tendencies (20% strongly agreeing) and only 16% disagreeing, indicating a higher prevalence of such tendencies.

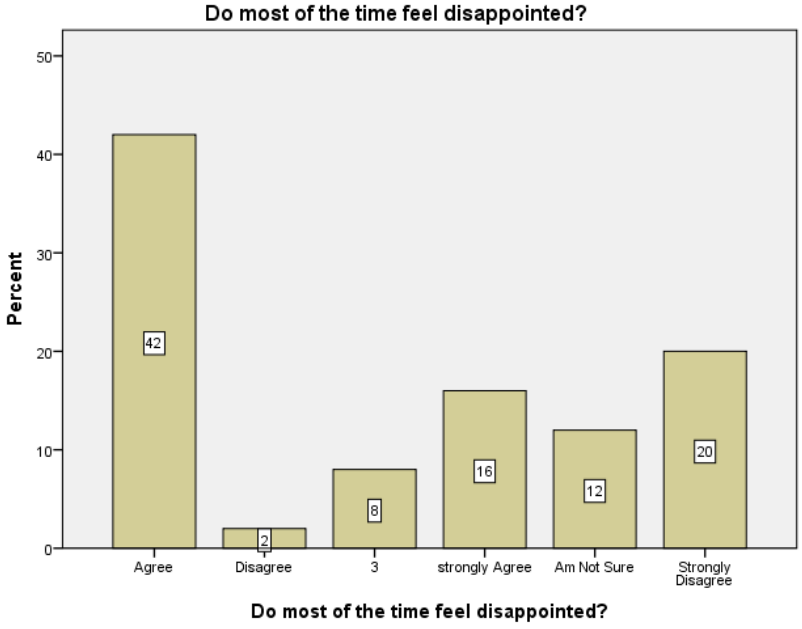

Figure 4.2. Level of disappointment among Chinese college students

Similarly, regarding the occurrence of the feeling of disappointment, 42% of participants agreeing that they have faced recurrent feelings of disappointment include 16% strongly agreeing and 20% strongly disagreeing, with this data aligning with previous data showing that participants with a higher rate of depressive tendency tend to have higher feelings of disappointment.

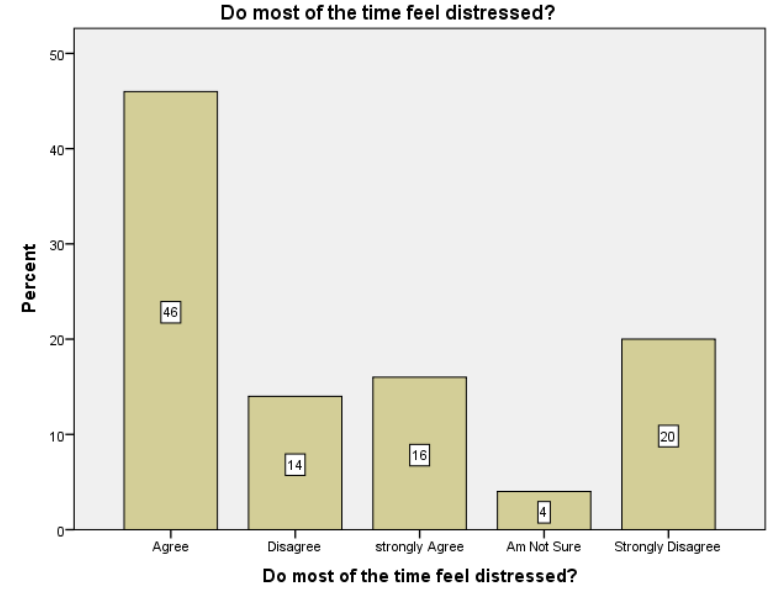

Figure 4.3. Level of Distress among Chinese college students

The results of this third question, in which the researcher asked about the level of distress among college students and 46% of participants declared often feeling a higher level of distress with 16% strongly agreeing and 20% strongly disagreeing, have also been similar to the previous self-reports, adding another level of reliability to concerns regarding the well-being of Chinese college students.

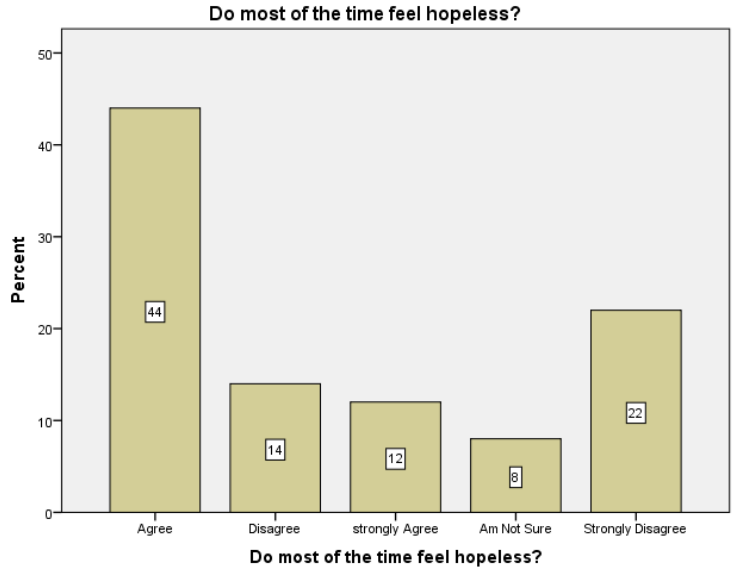

Figure 4.4. Level of hopelessness among Chinese college students

Data on the feeling of hopelessness found in synchrony with previous data regarding self-evaluation shows 44% of participants agreeing that they often feel hopeless, 12% strongly agreeing, and 22% strongly disagreeing, all aligned with previous self-reports.

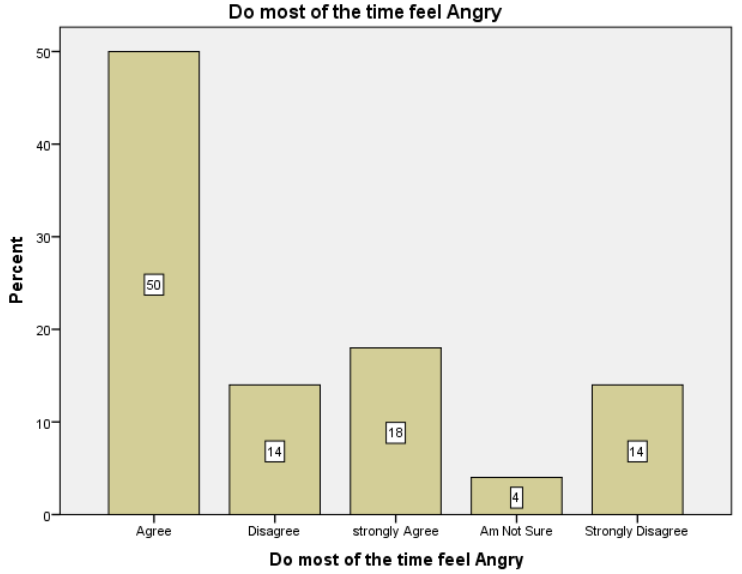

Figure 4.5. Level of anger among Chinese college students

Among all self-evaluations regarding psychological wellbeing, the prevalence of anger issues being the highest among Chinese college students is shown, with 50% of total respondents agreeing that they often face anger issues, 18% of participants strongly agreeing with this situation, and 14% of participants strongly disagreeing with this case, which is

found lowest in the entire section of self-evaluations.

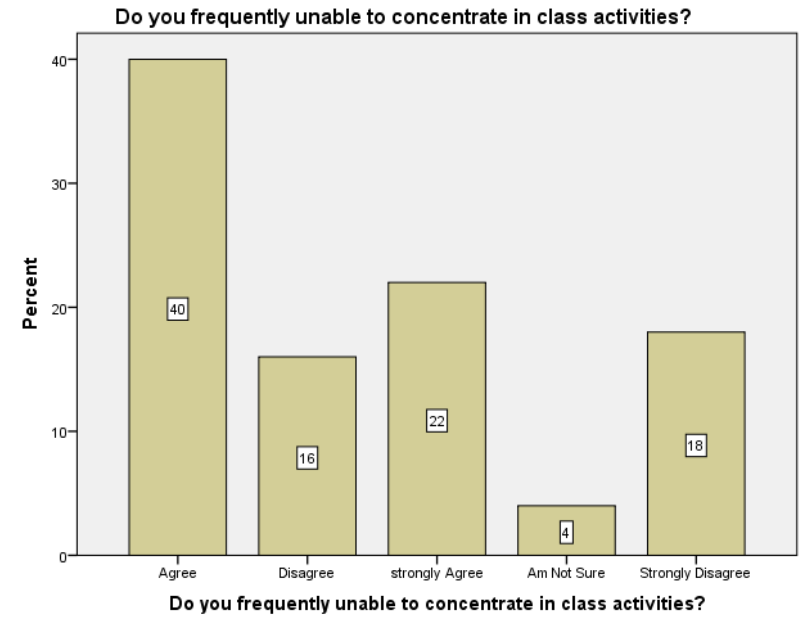

Figure 4.6. Lack of concentration among Chinese college students

In this question, participants being asked about the lack of concentration on studies shows that 40% of them agree to facing frequent concentration challenges in studies, with 22% strongly agreeing and 18% strongly disagreeing, a situation found aligned with previous data that participants with depressive tendencies often have a lack of concentration in daily activities.

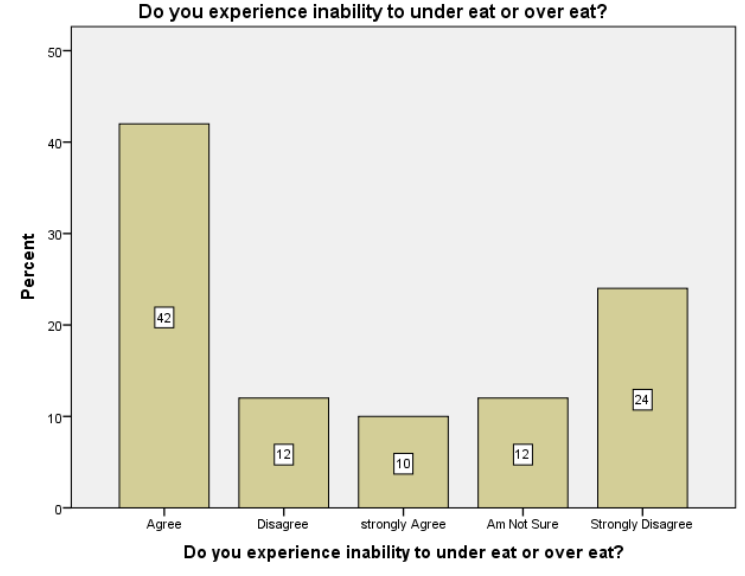

Figure 4.7. Eating challenges among Chinese college students

This section's last question asked about the prevalence of eating challenges among Chinese college students, with 42% of participants agreeing they often face eating problems in daily life, 10% of respondents strongly agreeing, and 24% strongly disagreeing, the highest percentage of strong disagreement in this section shaping the main symptoms of

depressive tendencies among Chinese college students.

Figure 4.8. Awareness of Psychological therapy among Chinese college students

This third section focuses on the awareness of Chinese college students about psychotherapy, their likelihood of undergoing therapy, and their frequency of seeking therapeutic help, with 42% of participants stating that their awareness of this clinical process, consistent with their average education level, is good while 18% strongly disagree.

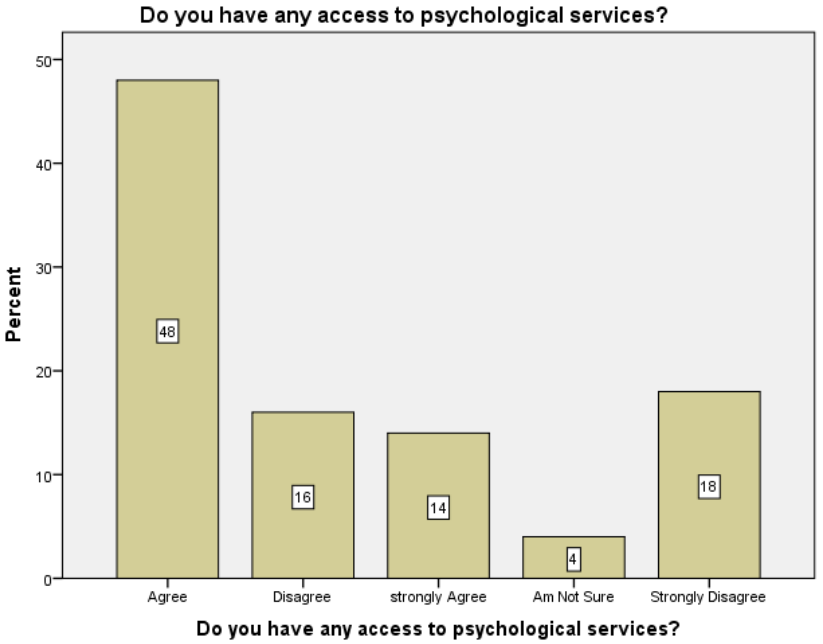

Figure 4.9. Access of Psychological services to Chinese college students

This question has asked participants about their accessibility to psychological services, with 46% of respondents agreeing in this case, which can be aligned with the socio - economic status of the majority of participants, and 18% of

participants strongly disagreeing regarding accessibility in this situation.

Figure 4.10. Chinese college students, who have received Psychological therapy

40% of the respondents have stated that they have received psychological therapy in their life, which can be justified through the level of awareness and accessibility of therapy to Chinese college students. However, 22% of them have strongly disagreed with this case, which can be discussed as a force of resistance.

4.2. Descriptive analysis

Under descriptive statistics, the researcher has calculated mean and standard deviation to identify and determine participants' average responses and response range, with the highest mean value of 3.14 indicating the high prevalence of this psychological challenge among Chinese college students and the lowest mean value of 2.18 indicating a lower value in this section; in terms of SD value, the highest SD value of 2.05 in self-evaluation regarding disappointment proving the diffusion of responses on that question and the lowest SD value of 1.45 found in the question of the prevalence of anger as a symptom.

4.3. Correlation

Calculations of correlation values across all survey questionnaires have identified the highest correlation value of 0.71 between the level of distress and the level of access to psychological resources, an intriguing high positive correlation indicating that students with higher distress levels have higher access to psychological services, and the lowest correlation value of 0.11 between the gender of participants and their prevalence of experiencing depressive tendencies, highlighting no gender difference in depressive tendency prevalence between male and female college students.

4.4. Chi-square

In this case, the researcher has calculated Chi-square values to determine the effectiveness of participants' age on different areas of well-being, with the lowest value of 33.706 calculated between participants' age and their awareness of psychological therapy, interpretable as age having the lowest effect on Chinese college students' awareness of psychological therapy, and the highest value of 64.68 found between participants' age and their experience of over or under eating, showing that participants' age has a significant impact on Chinese college students' experience of over or under eating.

5. Discussion

5.1. The challenges of college students can be solved through psychotherapy.

Consistent with Friedrich & Schlarb, college life is challenging for many students, leading to disappointment, distress, and helplessness, though Likert scale data shows divided perceptions—many find it distressing while a significant portion does not. Strepparava et al. [12]linked these issues to knowledge gaps from poor flow. Self-reports indicate high prevalence of depressive symptoms among Chinese college students, with anger, distress, hopelessness, disappointment, and concentration problems being prominent, while eating challenges are less common.

5.2. Most of the college students are not serious about psychotherapy services.

This study found that most college students agreed with seeking psychotherapy, while few disagreed, creating an ironic contrast with findings that such services reduce depression risk (Sun et al., 2020). Our results show many depressed students actually do seek psychotherapy, despite high awareness and accessibility. This dichotomy suggests potential barriers, prejudice, or insufficient quality in available services. Students may not take the process seriously, highlighting the need for increased awareness and accurate information. Strong policies are essential to help students understand psychotherapy's importance, reduce distress, and improve their academic experience and overall well-being.

5.3. Mindfulness is key to taking psychotherapy treatment seriously.

Agreeing with the study findings by Kingston et al.[9], psychotherapy is key to facilitating mindfulness. Mindfulness, a psychotherapy technique involving calm self-observation, is incompatible with distress, making it vital for college students' well-being. As a core tool, it enhances body awareness, helping detect psychological challenges often overlooked by students. Regular practice fosters daily insight into personal struggles, improving coping abilities and confidence. Research confirms mindfulness reduces depression scores, effectively alleviating stress and promoting healthier, more successful student lives.

5.4. There are enough psychotherapy Centres in the colleges.

Results disagree with Lattie et al. study that there are limited psychotherapy facilities at the colleges in that many students responded that there are enough facilities in the institutions. Despite ample psychotherapy institutions, high depression rates persist due to students' lack of seriousness toward treatment. While increased accessibility offers flexibility and early intervention, online therapy is often ineffective. Students should prioritize one-on-one sessions for genuine engagement.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

6.1. Conclusion

Psychotherapy, beneficial to college students and needing to be universally accessible, is acknowledged as available by most students but not taken seriously by many, with effective utilization of these services fostering positive behavior and societal success. Rising social media exposure promoting mindless trend-following, leading to anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues upon unmet expectations, correlates with increasing suicide rates and university dropouts, especially in China, coupled with intense academic and career pressures in the competitive Chinese environment, which makes mentally vulnerable students face significant challenges in coping with modern stressors.

6.2. Recommendations

The study recommends one-on-one psychotherapy over online sessions, which students often disregard. Interactive,

therapist-led sessions are advocated to help students manage college life and become productive members of society. Increasing awareness is key to encouraging continuous utilization, even during trauma. Future research should explore the natural causes of depression to broaden treatment scope. Finally, college stakeholders must prioritize psychotherapy to identify and implement suitable support measures.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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