

# An Empirical Study on College Students' Psychological Depression Tendency and Its Relieving Ways

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## Abstract

With the progress of social productivity and the development of the Internet, college students' psychological depression has gradually become a social problem, and at the same time, it is also an important issue related to college students' mental health. It is of great social significance and contemporary value to study the current situation of college students' tendency to psychological depression and provide them with referable relief paths. Taking students of Hunan College of Arts and Sciences as the target group, the study was conducted to find out the psychological depression status of college students in the four dimensions of individual, school, family and society through questionnaires, and the results were analyzed by spss27.0 data analysis software. Psychological depression in college students will show the characteristics of weakened instinctive drive, learned helplessness, self-enclosure, unclear self-orientation and low perceived social identity. To analyze the path of relief, college students should correctly deal with individual susceptibility factors and strengthen the existence of their own selves; teachers should reasonably and objectively evaluate students and guide them to correctly attribute their depression; families should strengthen parent-child interaction and learning, and correctly recognize and strengthen intimate relationships; and society should establish a social and objective evaluation mechanism to enhance college students' sense of self-worth.

## Keywords

College students; Psychology; Depression; Depressive tendencies.

## 1. Preface

In recent years, there have been more and more social incidents caused by students' depression, and the national attention to students' psychological condition is also increasing. University is the transition stage for students to enter society, and the mental health of college students is especially in need of social attention. China's depression is a serious disease in the world, and related research shows that depression is showing a trend of rejuvenation in China, with the proportion of college students increasing year by year, and "depression" has become a popular phenomenon among college students. This study aims to help college students and society to better understand the symptoms and causes of depression, to find ways to relieve depression, and to enable college students to better understand their own psychology and to cope with their studies and life in a positive and correct manner. Studying the depression tendency of college students and analyzing the current situation to find a way to alleviate it is of great significance to the college students themselves, and also of great value to society.

## 2. Characterization of Psychological Depressive Tendencies in University Students

In order to achieve the research objectives, the research team randomly selected about 430 college students in Hunan College of Arts and Sciences for sampling. The team distributed 430 questionnaires, 420 questionnaires were returned, and 416 valid questionnaires were screened, achieving a 98% questionnaire recovery rate and 99% validity rate. The study used SPSS27.0 statistical analysis software as a tool to analyze the questionnaire reliability with Cronbach's coefficient, and analyze the questionnaire data with composite mean and Spearman's correlation coefficient.

### 2.1. Weakening of the instinctive drive of university students in the context of disordered thinking and behavior

The concept of the brain guiding behavior is inconsistent with the actual action in reality, which is the manifestation that makes depression patients suffer a lot mentally. That is, the disorder of thinking and action. The direct manifestation of the disorder of thinking and behavior of college students is the fluctuation of mood, which further manifests itself in the weakening of instinctive drive. Through the analysis of the questionnaire results, 54.9% of the college students will have moments of disorder of thinking and behavior, and 45.91% of the college students do not have the phenomenon of thinking and behavior. 45.91% of college students do not experience disordered thinking and behavior. The research group used the independent t-test in SPSS27.0 statistical analysis software to analyze the collected data related to college students' tendency to psychological depression, and used emotion as a variable to analyze the difference between college students' instinctive behaviors when they are emotionally stable and when they are emotionally unstable, and the specific results are shown in Table 1. Appetite, sleep, mobility, memory, and desire to interact with others of the college students surveyed when their moods are stable and when they are unstable show highly significant differences, which indicates that college students are generally susceptible to the influence of their moods, but it was also found that 16 of the surveyed students' choices were "weak" regardless of their moods fluctuating or not. The results of the Hamilton Depression Inventory for the 16 students showed that 2 of them had a total score of less than 17, while the other 14 had a total score of more than 17, which initially determined that the 16 students had a tendency to depression, which was manifested by the weakening of instinctive drive.

**Table 1.** Analysis of variance between the effects of mood swings on instinctive drives of college students

	Emotional stability	emotional instability	t	p
	M±SD	M±SD		
appetite	2.70±0.494	1.76±0.807	20.302	<0.001
sleep	2.64±0.564	1.64±0.727	22.001	<0.001
Strength of action	2.62±0.556	1.73±0.771	19.136	<0.001
ability remember	2.59±0.565	1.69±0.760	19.516	<0.001
Desire to socialize	2.58±0.580	1.71±0.794	18.011	<0.001

### 2.2. Learned helplessness of university students under high competitive pressure

Through the bivariate correlation analysis in spss27.0 statistical analysis software to analyze the data collected about the tendency of psychological depression of college students, the

correlation between the degree of influence of stress on their own motivation and the degree of concern of college students for teachers' evaluation and the degree of influence of failure on college students themselves was analyzed, and the specific data are shown in Table 2. The result is that the correlation between the influence of pressure on one's own motivation and the influence of college students' concern for teachers' evaluation and failure on college students is positive and significant. This suggests that the greater the impact of stress on a college student's motivation, the greater the impact of teacher evaluations and failures on that student. Random interviews with five students who chose "high influence" for all three options indicated that they were very frustrated and powerless in the face of high competitive pressure; interviews with five students who chose "low influence" for all three options indicated that they would choose to be powerless in the face of high competitive pressure; and interviews with five students who chose "low influence" for all three options indicated that they would choose to be powerless in the face of high competitive pressure. The other five students, who chose "low impact" for all three options, said that they would choose to feel nothing in the face of pressure, and that they preferred coping with pressure with the attitude of "lying down". In this questionnaire survey, 32.93% of college students chose "powerless", 39.66% chose "Buddhist", and 27.4% chose "full of motivation". Various studies have also shown that college students' depression shows a sense of powerlessness to things, such as the article "Analysis of the Causes of College Students' Depression" (Jing Luo), which shows that "college students' depression will make them feel powerless to anything, not only in their studies, but also in their personal emotions and their personal actions". [1] So it can be initially determined that college students with depression tendencies will show acquired helplessness when they face the pressure of high intensity competition.

**Table 2.** Correlation analysis between stress affectivity and college teachers' care about evaluation and failure affectivity

targets	The extent to which stress affects one's own motivation	Level of concern about teacher evaluations	The extent to which failure to do something affects oneself
The extent to which stress affects one's own motivation	1		
Level of concern about teacher evaluations	.979**	1	
The extent to which failure to do something affects oneself	.973**	.972**	1

Note: \* and \*\* indicate significant correlation at the  $P < 0.05$  level  $P < 0.01$  level highly significant correlation, respectively.

### 2.3. Self-imposed isolation of university students in the absence of understanding of intimate relationships

The bivariate correlation analysis in spss27.0 statistical analysis software was used to analyze the data collected on college students' tendency to psychological depression, and the correlation between the importance of the parent-child relationships to college students, the closeness of college students' family relationship, and college students' willingness to interact with their parents was analyzed, and the specific data are shown in Table 3. The results show that the correlation between the importance of parent-child relationship to college students,

the closeness of family relationship and the willingness of college students to interact with their parents are all positive and significant. This indicates that the more important the parent-child relationship is to college students, the greater the closeness of their family relationship and their willingness to interact with their parents. One of the main reasons affecting the closeness of family relationships is communication and understanding between parents and children, and the willingness of college students to interact with their parents is lower in family relationships that lack communication and transpersonal thinking. A number of relevant studies have also shown that college students' psychological depression is inextricably linked to their families, and the lower the degree of intimacy between families, the less communication between parents and children, and the lower the level of parental education, i.e., the greater the generation gap, the greater the likelihood that their children will be psychologically depressed. "The generation of depression in college students is also often related to unstable family relationships and children's long-term lack of understanding and inability to better channel negative emotions".[2]In the absence of understanding in close relationships among college students, depression among college students manifests itself in self-imposed isolation.

**Table 3.** Correlation analysis between the importance of parent-child relationship and university students' family closeness and willingness to parent-child interaction

targets	The Importance of Parent-Child Relationships for Yourself	Closeness of family relationships	Willingness to interact with parents
The Importance of Parent-Child Relationships for Yourself	1		
Closeness of family relationships	.931**	1	
Willingness to interact with parents	.940**	.979**	1

Note: \* and \*\* indicate significant correlation at the  $P < 0.05$  level  $P < 0.01$  level highly significant correlation, respectively.

#### 2.4. Low self-identity of university students with unclear self-orientation

Through the bivariate correlation analysis in spss27.0 statistical analysis software to analyze the data collected about the tendency of college students to psychological depression, we analyzed the correlation between the degree of clarity of college students' self-positioning and the degree of concern of college students for their personal social identity and college students' sense of self-worth, and the specific data are shown in Table 4. The results show that there is a positive and significant correlation between the degree of self-orientation clarity of college students, the degree of concern for personal social identity and the sense of self-worth of college students. This indicates that the clearer the self-definition of college students, the higher the degree of concern for social identity and sense of self-worth of college students. College students with ambiguous self-orientation also have a relatively low sense of self-identity. College students often make self-comparisons because they can't find the right orientation, and they often care about others' comments and suggestions, which will easily lead to negative emotions, resulting in lower self-identity, and gradually leading to college students' depression.

**Table 4.** Correlation analysis between self-orientation clarity and personal social identity care and self-worth of college students

targets	Self-positioning clarity	Personal Social Identity Concern	sense of self-worth
Self-positioning clarity	1		
Personal Social Identity Concern	.971**	1	
sense of self-worth	.960**	.942**	1

Note: \* and \*\* indicate significant correlation at the  $P < 0.05$  level  $P < 0.01$  level highly significant correlation, respectively.

### 3. Causes of Psychological Depressive Tendencies in College Students

#### 3.1. Increased tension between the inner and outer selves

Under the environment of intensified involution in all aspects of society, college students strive for perfection in their outer selves, and will take action to change and adjust themselves according to the evaluation or requirements of the outside world to make their outer selves conform to the expectations of the public, so as to form a kind of stable identity of the self. It is very common for college students to package their outer selves. They desire to be recognized by others, but they are afraid of being criticized for not conforming to external expectations, and they are afraid of showing their true selves, which leads to too much tension between their outer selves and inner selves. University and secondary school life environment compared with the deviation of the two generated by the sense of difference also led to the growth of anxiety in college students, individuals cannot meet the "external expectations", began to be not firm and not confident in their own, into self-doubt, self-denial. These factors cause students to lose their good mood, which in turn affects their ability to act and leads to depression.

#### 3.2. Lack of "positive reinforcement" for correct attribution

Positive reinforcement in psychology is defined as any outcome that results in an increased likelihood that we will engage in that behavior later. Behaviors bring about outcomes, and those outcomes influence future behaviors. Positive reinforcement occurs when a behavior causes an outcome that leads to an increased likelihood that the college student will engage in that behavior again in the future.

The college stage is a sensitive stage when college students are shifting from campus life to social life, and college students at this stage are in great need of someone to help them determine a direction to work hard or plan a clear path in life. Skinner's reinforcement theory and Pavlov's conditioned reflex experiments discuss the influence of environmental stimuli on behavior under external factors, and many behavioral scientists believe that reinforcement theory helps to understand and guide people's behavior, and nowadays some college students lack positive reinforcement, and their subconscious mind doesn't know how to take action and doesn't have a correct way to understand things, which leads to easy judgment of events. They do not know how to act subconsciously and do not know how to recognize things correctly, which leads to biased judgment of events. For example, they don't get praise and affirmation from teachers in their studies, don't get enough companionship and care from parents in their family, don't get encouragement and support from friends in their life, etc. They don't get timely rewards and correct guidance, and don't get positive feedbacks and affirmations from the outside world.

In addition, some college students may also fall into a low state of the self, the wrong reasons for the incident all attributed to themselves, causing great psychological pressure and burden on themselves, in the long run the formation of a depressed state, a vicious circle, the ability to

take action on things weakened cannot interest in their own loss of self-confidence; there are some college students will be attributed to the outside world, the formation of an unbalanced state of mind, the growth of negative emotions, and refused to communicate with the outside world, ultimately leading to the emergence of depression. Some college students will attribute all the causes to the outside world, forming an unbalanced state of mind, increasing negative emotions, and refusing to communicate with the outside world.

### **3.3. Instability of object relations between parents and children**

The first object relationship of a child is parent-child relationship, which plays a very important role in the child's growth. Family environment, family education, parent-child communication and other factors will affect the psychological condition of a college student. Most college students are still psychologically dependent on their parents, who are one of their main confidants and the closest and most trustworthy people around them. Parents' emotional effectiveness is also likely to lead to the instability of parent-child object relationship, and it is easy to cause parent-child conflicts if problems are not solved and communicated in time, thus the instability of parent-child object relationship becomes stronger, and college students are more prone to depression in the case of unstable parent-child object relationship.

### **3.4. College students become less psychologically resilient and have a high degree of inward attribution**

With the globalization of the economy and the introduction of Western values, college students have become more self-conscious and have a stronger desire to realize their self-worth. "Positive psychologists point to the emergence of inappropriate attitudes and patterns of thinking in the life of the individual through childhood, such as arbitrary extrapolation, selective out-of-context quotes, overgeneralization, and individualization. Depressed college students, in turn, trigger negative thinking schemas when they encounter distressing situations, interpret their experiences in a negative way, and develop pessimistic explanatory styles, believing that they are defeated, that they are worthless, and that there is no hope for the future".[3] Nowadays, many college students have the mentality of "perfectionism", and once something happens that does not match with the idea or does not meet their expectations, the gap between the reality and the ideal will make them feel powerless and desperate. The incomplete cognition of college students in the face of events, irrational self-knowledge of the existence of bias is prone to cause college students with low self-esteem, self-defeat, avoidance of denial and other negative emotions, poor mental capacity, sensitive and fragile college students will be prone to depression.

## **4. Paths to Relief of Psychological Depressive Tendencies in College Students**

### **4.1. Correctly dealing with individual susceptibility factors and strengthening the existence of one's own self**

"Individual susceptibility factors are individual factors that predispose to triggering a coping response".[4] Individual susceptibility factors can be categorized into physiological, psychological, and cognitive aspects. In physiological aspect, individual susceptibility factors mainly include family genetics and hormone secretion. In the physiological term, college students should not overdo psychological darkness and amplify the depressive effect of this aspect in the psychological. In the psychological aspect, individual susceptibility factors mainly include personality traits and emotion regulation, for which college psychology teachers should fully understand students and guide them correctly. In the cognitive aspect, individual susceptibility factors are mainly cognitive styles. Schools can carry out all kinds of educational activities for students to learn various ways of cognizing themselves, and at the same time,

college students should participate in social activities more often, to find out and use the cognitive styles learned in practice to improve themselves, and parents should play a regulating role in this process, to guide their children to look at the problem correctly and solve the problem.

College students should strengthen the existence of their own "self". Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's structural theory proposes three main parts of the mind: ego, self, and superego. The "ego" is developed through learning and environment, between the "ego" and the "superego", and is responsible for dealing with reality, being directed by the "ego" and influenced by the "superego". It is responsible for dealing with reality and is directed by the "ego" and limited by the "superego". College students can strengthen their ego by exercising self-control. The process of dealing with individual susceptibility factors is the process of exercising the capacity of the "ego".

#### **4.2. Teachers evaluate students reasonably and objectively and guide students to make correct attributions**

Understanding the causes of contemporary college students' problems and seeking effective solutions are the duties and obligations of college teachers, as well as the important prerequisite for college students' healthy growth and self-achievement. Teachers' evaluation of students is very important for students' self-knowledge and self-orientation. Under the background of quality education, performance is no longer the only evaluation standard. College teachers should evaluate students from different aspects and multiple perspectives. College teachers should also focus on students' growth, strengthen communication and understanding with students. In this regard, the school can also organize more teacher-student fellowship competitions. On the one hand, to create the opportunity for students to get along with the teachers, on the other hand, the teachers can also find out the unique characteristics of each student in the process. On the other hand, teachers can discover the uniqueness of each student in the process.

In the process of attribution, teachers need to intentionally guide students to look for subjective reasons from themselves first, and guide students to analyze their own abilities and efforts. In the process of attribution, students will inevitably have self-attribution bias, so the teacher as a third party should comprehensively analyze the problem, help students objectively understand themselves and fully explore their own strengths. Allowing students to make self-attribution first, and then the teacher gives comments, which helps to cultivate students' attribution ability and sense of responsibility, and helps students to attribute correctly and enhance their self-confidence, sense of value and sense of need by fully understanding them and making reasonable and effective evaluations of them.

#### **4.3. Enhance parent-child interaction and learning to correctly recognize and strengthen the intimate relationship**

Intimacy is an interpersonal relationship between parents and children formed over a long period of interactive life, with the important power to shape the self and personality. "Some studies have found that the intervention of psychological crisis caused by family factors cannot be achieved overnight, and a single financial help or psychological counseling cannot solve the psychological problems of students at the root". [5] College students already have the ability to judge the health of family relationships by spending long periods of time with their parents. Healthy family relationships require family members to run and maintain each other, and to give each other understanding, support, help and love on the basis of mutual respect. Communication is a very important part of parent-child interaction and intimacy, and both parents and children, should pay attention to the way of communication. The university could be appropriate to carry out psychological lectures, to guide college students to learn to

communicate correctly and actively with their parents. At the same time, parents should also learn to reflect. Parents should be in the process of educating children to accept the correct concepts and knowledge of education, as a way to reduce the generation gap between parents and children, to enhance the intimate relationship.

#### **4.4. Establishing a social and objective evaluation mechanism to enhance college students' sense of self - worth**

Out of school, the first problem many college students face is choosing a career. "With the development of the times, identity in society is categorized, and it is easy to be picked by 'colored glasses' when choosing a career and employment". [6] Such a situation is often the result of social bias evaluation, to which the establishment of a social objective evaluation mechanism is an important way to alleviate career and identity discrimination, and the method can also help college students find their social orientation.

"Social objective evaluation mechanism should firstly be led by the government to play the role of the government, and secondly, the development mode of college education should be changed accordingly".[7] the degree of objectivity of social evaluation is closely related to the evaluation standards of society, therefore, the establishment of a social objective evaluation mechanism first requires the establishment of relatively objective, fair and measurable evaluation standards. Various aspects of society and various industries in the workplace on the evaluation standards of college students are very diverse. In the government to guide the various aspects of society and various industries to establish objective evaluation standards, the evaluation standards for the details of the control cannot be completely convergent, but the government can be at the macro level of the various aspects of society, various industries to grasp the objectivity of the evaluation standards. For example, when evaluating the performance or achievement of a certain aspect of college students, the evaluation party can be asked to conduct a dynamic investigation of college students, but also in the understanding of college students' own personality, family background and other information before assessing the performance of a certain aspect of college students, so as to achieve the objectivity of the evaluation of college students. Secondly, the establishment of a social objective evaluation mechanism requires families, schools and society to strengthen the connection and cooperation, and to establish an integrated, diversified and comprehensive evaluation system. Ideally, the social evaluation of college students should be a comprehensive evaluation of all aspects of college students as a whole, which not only includes the views of college teachers, college students' assessment, but also includes the opinions of students' parents and college students' personal opinions, etc. However, in reality, the evaluation often only includes some people's views or only evaluates some aspects of students, and the lack of comprehensiveness and balance in the evaluation process can lead to a relatively big difference in the evaluation results. The lack of comprehensiveness and balance in the evaluation process will lead to big deviations in the evaluation results. The integrated evaluation system of home, school and society can be realized in the form of "Internet+", which can not only ensure the objectivity of the evaluation results, but also greatly improve the efficiency of social evaluation of college students. Social evaluation and college students' sense of self-worth are often positively correlated, and an objective evaluation mechanism can avoid extreme or disproportionate evaluations and make it easier to improve college students' sense of self-worth.

### **5. Concluding Remarks**

This study is devoted to analyzing the characteristics and causes of depression in college students and exploring the path to relief. There are many factors that may cause depression among college students, and their depression is not only manifested in their external behaviors, such as weakened instinctive drive and learned helplessness, but also in their internal emotions,



such as self-containment and low sense of self-identity. Targeted relief paths not only require college students to deal with their own emotions correctly and reasonably, and to face life and study with a positive attitude, but also require colleges and universities, families, governments, and social groups to make changes and make joint efforts to build the walls of college students' mental health.

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