Employment pressure of Chinese college students and its alleviating strategies

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Abstract. With the increasing competition in the society, the employment problem is one of the main pressures on the current college students. Employment pressure is one of the key research topics in today's research. The increasing employment pressure of college students has brought negative impact on their heart health. This kind of pressure for a long time can lead to serious conditions such as insomnia, anxiety, depression and even suicide, which is not conducive to the development of college students' physical and mental health, so it is very important to alleviate college students' employment pressure. This paper analyzes the causes of college students' employment stress, and also studies and analyzes the intervention programs and mitigation strategies for college students to cope with employment stress at the social, school and individual levels, and explores the relationship between college students' employment stress, their coping styles and their mental health. The purpose of this paper is to understand the negative impacts of employment pressure on college students, and comprehensively put forward measures to alleviate employment pressure, analyze the implementation effect of these measures, and organize and summarize the strategies that are conducive to alleviating employment pressure on college students. The results of this study provide certain reference significance for alleviating the employment pressure of college students.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and current status of the research

The employment problem has long been widely concerned, and it is one of the main pressures on college students at present. This kind of pressure, once caused by a long period of bad mood, can lead to serious conditions such as insomnia, anxiety, depression and even suicide [1]. This is not conducive to the development of students' physical and mental health. This paper thus proposes to verify the effectiveness of college students' employment stress strategies with certain significance. In the past 20 years, Chinese scholars have mainly focused on the concept, structure, measurement, developmental characteristics and alleviation strategies of college students' employment stress, and have achieved many valuable research results. At present, the validation of the effectiveness of strategies to alleviate college students' employment stress is relatively general, and the analysis of the effectiveness of comprehensive and effective alleviation strategies is relatively scarce. Therefore, this paper explores and analyzes the relationship between college students' employment stress, their coping styles and their mental health by understanding the various strategies used by college students to alleviate employment stress, and summarizes the strategies that are conducive to the alleviation of college students' employment stress.

1.2 Purpose and significance of the research

This paper analyzes the causes of college students' employment pressure and the different mitigation strategies and interventions at the social, school, and individual levels. The present study aims to explore and summarizes the strategies at the political and educational levels to effectively mitigate the employment pressure of college students, providing colleges and universities and college students with more choices, and providing certain references to mitigate the employment pressure of college students.

2 Employment pressure

2.1 Definition of the concept of employment stress

In recent years, research on stress has received more and more attention. However, up to now, there has not been a unified theory, and in the academic world, the most commonly used is the interaction theory proposed by Lazarus [2]. This theory regards stress as a psychological feeling caused by an internal or external stimulus that affects an individual's body and mind in some way. And
employment stress refers to a persistent psychological state of anxiety, fear, and depression and the corresponding behavioral patterns that an individual feels subjectively when he or she is looking for a job [3]. Its connotation includes three aspects: first, the "state of mind", i.e., the inner state of mind of a person. Secondly, it is generated by two reasons: one is external motivation, and the other is internal motivation, i.e., the motivation in the physical and mental development of the individual; thirdly, in the cognitive evaluation of the individual, the life events or external stimuli will affect the individual and produce certain psychological feelings [4].

2.2 Causes and influences of employment pressure

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2.2.1 Fierce competitive environment

As the country's level of development continues to rise, higher education is becoming increasingly popularized and the number of college graduates is growing. The Ministry of Education released that China's 2022 college graduates increased by 1.67 million compared with the 2021 class, and the competitiveness continues to increase. At the same time, Tang Dingfang found that due to China's economic structure is extremely unbalanced, resulting in some positions have more talent demand, and some positions have particularly low talent demand [5]. This leads to a mismatch between the demand for talent by employers and the number of college students supplied, and the contradiction between supply and demand is apparent. The phenomenon of difficult employment will persist for a long time, which will bring greater employment pressure to the majority of graduates, and as a result of this, more or less psychological problems will appear.

2.2.2 Lack of social support

For the effect of social support on anxiety, stress and depression, Yuejuan Zhang argued that an individual's depression is strongly related to stress, social support and coping styles [6]. Employment stress among college students can lead to anxiety and depression, and the three are significantly correlated [1]. Tian Lan showed that social support was the main source of personal coping with stress, and social support can stimulate personal coping strategies and promote skill proficiency, which in turn has an impact on college students’ feelings of employment stress [4]. Wang Dejiang showed that positive social support is negatively related to employment stress, while negative social support is positively related to employment stress. Therefore lack of social support increases employment stress [7].

2.2.3 Grade level differences

Zhao Xiaofang's study found that senior students have the highest employment stress which is consistent with the findings of Chen Yuhong and Chen Yirong [8-10]. The study showed that the sense of employment stress decreases from senior, junior, freshman, and sophomore in that order. Senior students are directly facing employment, graduates are facing career choices and are experiencing difficulties and confusion in the job search process. They obviously feel the pressure from employment, especially the lack of confidence in their majors, and they are also worried about their professional counterparts, whether they can find a job suitable for their majors, or whether they are engaged in a job that has nothing to do with their majors. Therefore, senior students obviously feel the most pressure from employment.

2.2.4 Lack of clarity in personal career planning

According to Jan Yunli,Wang Xin’s results of the survey show that regardless of gender and grade, more than 50% of college students have considered their career development, but career aspirations and planning are dominated by vague ideas [11]. This is also reflected in the study of Tang Dingfang, in which only 22.18% of the 542 respondents were relatively clear about their career direction, and 77.72% of the students did not have a clear career direction and had low interest and motivation in their majors [5]. This will have a negative impact on the insufficient mastery of the knowledge and skills they have learned. These students will feel confused, anxious and under employment pressure when they graduate.

2.2.5 Professional differences

Zhao Xiaofang found that the difference between liberal arts and science college students in terms of employment stress was significant, with liberal arts students experiencing greater employment stress [8]. Meanwhile, Cui Yan's study showed that subjects majoring in arts and history scored significantly higher in anxiety condition than those in science and technology, and all stress scores in arts and history were significantly higher than those in science and technology [12]. This is consistent with the results of Liu Fengchuan's study, which showed that the total mean employment stress scores, employment emotional distress, subjective psychological experience, physiological reactions, and behavioral manifestations of university graduates were significantly different in their majors, and that the scores of graduates from literature and history majors were higher than those of graduates from science and technology majors [13]. Zhu Bikang's study also shows that from the perspective of specialty type, the employment pressure feeling of literature and history is
higher than that of science and technology, and the number of literature and history majors in the survey is 75, accounting for 25.3%, and the number of science and technology majors is 221, accounting for 74.7%. The percentage of people who feel a greater or a great deal of employment pressure in literature and history majors is 73.3%, and in science and technology majors is 69.2%. This is mainly due to the fact that employment in literature and history majors is The main reason for this is that the employment of literature and history majors is limited in terms of job types and relatively low salary [14].

2.2.6 Gender difference

The findings of Xiao Lingyan and Zhang Yuzhu are in line with the findings that the gender difference in employment stress among senior graduates is relatively significant, and Xie Jie showed that this might be due to the occupational gender stereotyping of females in the society [15-17]. In addition, Wu Zhiying showed that females have been consistently more stressed than males in family rearing and work, they are more anxious than males when looking for a job, and they also need to spend more time experiencing balancing work and family stresses [18].

2.2.7 Difference in place of origin

Tang Jian's study showed that college students' employment pressure also showed significant differences in terms of birthplace [19]. College students with rural origins have the highest employment pressure, followed by those with county origins, and the lowest employment pressure is for those with urban origins. This is consistent with the findings of Chen Yuhong [9]. Zhao Xiaofang found consistent with the findings of Liu Fengchuan and Zhong Xiaohuan that compared with urban college students, rural students have relatively weaker networking resources and relationship networks, which weaken the chances of engaging in better units, resulting in greater employment pressure faced by college students from rural birthplaces [8,13,20].

3 Strategies to alleviate employment pressure

3.1 Educational level

(1) To alleviate the pressure on employment, it is recommended that the relevant regulations be improved to safeguard the employment rights of university students.

(2) To reduce the pressure on women's employment, the cost of family upbringing should be socialized and externalized, and the government should bear a certain amount of the costs.

(3) To reduce stereotypes of women, women's self-esteem and self-control should be improved. This has a protective effect on women's cognitive ability to buffer negative emotions and employment stress [21].

3.2 Policy level

3.2.1 On-campus career planning and employment guidance program

Guo Wenli and Li Weiwei emphasized the importance of career guidance education in alleviating employment pressure [22]. Yingping Zhang showed that the impact of career counseling on career decision self-efficacy has both immediate and sustained improvement effects [23]. Tan Jia and Tang Jian took freshman and sophomore students as research subjects and conducted career planning for them in the form of group counseling and course counseling respectively [24,19]. Tang Jian's study showed that it had a sustained effect, and the self-efficacy of career decision-making was improved to a certain extent, which had a positive effect on college students' alleviation of employment pressure [19].

Wang Jinliang's findings found that career decision-making skills training coupled with attribution training can help college students make career decisions reasonably, enhance their self-confidence, and relieve stress [25]. Liu Lei found by analyzing the mean of pre and post-test of SCL-90, SAS and college students' employment coping styles in the experimental group that employment guidance courses can effectively improve college students' employment coping styles and alleviate the level of college students' employment stress [3]. Therefore, employment guidance courses are offered to effectively improve college students' employment coping styles and alleviate their employment pressure.

3.2.2 In-school group counseling program

College students' employment stress can cause anxiety and depression, which are significantly correlated [1], while positive coping is negatively correlated with depression [26], and negative coping is positively correlated with employment stress and depression [9]. Therefore, improving coping or mitigating negative emotions through group counseling can effectively reduce college students' employment stress. Zhao Xiaofang's study showed that college students through group counseling intervention programs had some improvement in emotion perception and regulation, and a more positive and optimistic mindset [8]. Zhang Ying's study on the intervention to enhance employment coping ability is similar to Xu Yuan and Jiang Yong's study [27,28]. All of them enhanced college students' positive coping styles in employment and alleviated employment pressure through group counseling interventions. The difference is that they used a comprehensive intervention combining career guidance and group psychological training, while Zhang Ying study focused on guiding members to monitor, regulate, and explore suitable employment coping styles from the perspective of positive metacognition, but also achieved significant results [27].
3.2.3 Music therapy intervention strategies

Music therapy can relieve one's own stress, for example, Wang Lin's receptive music therapy and Lei Wei's study, both confirmed the practical effect of music therapy on college students' adjustment of stressful study and life emotions, providing positive ways of coping, and relieving stress [29,30]. Zhang Xiaomin's group music therapy played an effective role in relieving psychological stress in college students [31]. Because these interventions are used to alleviate a wide range of stresses, they may be equally effective in alleviating employment anxiety.

3.2.4 Intervention strategies for intramural sports programs

Participation in intramural sports programs can relieve one's stress, and various studies have shown that exercises such as yoga, basketball, and aerobics have some effect on releasing stress. Li-Man Sun found that 12 weeks of moderate-intensity yoga training could improve women's sense of well-being, improve burnout, improve sleep quality, and relieve working women's stress [32]. Sun Haiyan found that 12 weeks of aerobics exercise had a better effect on relieving psychological stress of freshmen girls through a comparative study of 6 weeks and 12 weeks of aerobics exercise [33]. Ji Qun showed that basketball plus aerobics and its combination exercise can relieve psychological pressure of college students, and the longer the duration, the better the effect, of which the effect of 12 weeks is the most significant [34].

4 Conclusion

4.1 Limitations of the original literature study

In terms of causes and influencing factors, most of the previous research is relevant empirical research, and there is a lack of synthesis for unified aggregation and organization. Intervention-related literature only focuses on specific intervention methods, such as only proposing research on school group counseling programs, without a summary of coping strategies. At the same time the original literature is less mentioned about the impact of gender differences and other factors on employment stress.

4.2 Uniqueness of this study and suggestions

First, this study analyzes and summarizes the conclusions of multiple intervention studies based on the findings, and collates new conclusions of multiple effective mitigation strategies and intervention programs to make up for the scarcity. Second, this paper organizes the measures that can be taken at different levels according to the summary, summarizes a wealth of effective group counseling programs from the social, school, and individual levels, and adds personal intervention programs such as sports and music to provide more references for the intervention programs available to colleges students and make up for the singularity. Finally, this study analyzes the causes of gender differences on employment pressure, organizes effective strategies and tries to propose mitigation strategies based on the research experiments found to reduce the cost of women's family upbringing and occupational gender stereotypes.

4.3 Insufficient research

The mitigation strategy is only a theoretical reference, and colleges and universities need to develop feasible group counseling programs and employment guidance classes suitable for their students' majors according to the real situation of their own schools. This paper does not go deep enough into the study of employment pressure, but lays the foundation for further in-depth research in the future.

4.4 Summary and implications

To summarize: this study shows that the increased pressure of social competition, the lack of social support, the lack of clear career planning of students, and the factors affecting the differences in specialties, grades, genders, and places of origin increase the pressure on university students to find employment. This causes serious conditions such as anxiety, depressed mood and even suicide. College students should have the courage to face employment problems head-on, actively participate in intervention strategies such as career guidance classes and group counseling sessions, start planning clear career goals at an earlier age, improve their career decision-making skills, and actively cope with employment problems. College students should also improve their competitiveness to alleviate employment pressure, as well as reduce stress through exercise and music therapy.

Inspiration: Through the study, it is found that there are a lot of generalizations to verify the effects of the strategies for relieving college students' employment pressure, and there is a lack of analysis of the effects of comprehensively organizing the effective strategies for relieving employment pressure. Future research should start from the direction of analyzing and synthesizing effective relief strategies.

Authors contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

References