

An Examination of Stress Management Strategies for University Counselors in the Context of Psychological Crisis Response

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Abstract: *College counselors play an indispensable role in safeguarding student mental health, particularly in the context of psychological crisis intervention, where they are often the first responders to emergencies such as suicidal ideation, acute anxiety episodes, trauma responses, and severe emotional distress. While the importance of their work is widely recognized, the intense demands of crisis intervention place significant psychological strain on counselors themselves, leading to elevated levels of occupational stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout. This study examines the stress management challenges faced by college counselors engaged in psychological crisis intervention, with the aim of identifying effective coping strategies and institutional support mechanisms. Drawing on occupational stress theory and the job demands-resources model, the research explores the unique stressors associated with crisis work, including high-stakes decision-making, emotional labor, role ambiguity, and the constant pressure of availability. Additionally, the study investigates the individual and organizational factors that mitigate or exacerbate stress, such as professional training, peer support, supervisory guidance, and institutional policies regarding workload and self-care. The findings suggest that sustainable stress management requires a dual approach: equipping counselors with personal coping skills—including mindfulness practices, boundary-setting, and clinical supervision—while simultaneously fostering institutional environments that prioritize counselor well-being through manageable caseloads, accessible mental health resources, and a culture that destigmatizes help-seeking among professionals. By addressing both individual resilience and systemic support, institutions can better sustain their counseling workforce and ensure the continued delivery of effective crisis intervention services to students.*

Keywords: Counselor; Crisis intervention; Stress management.

1. THE ROLE OF COLLEGE COUNSELORS IN THE CONTEXT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS INTERVENTION

Because of its unique advantages, the counselor group is the most important undertaker of the frontline work of psychological crisis intervention in colleges and universities. In the context of psychological crisis intervention, the nature of the intervention work, the state of the intervention object, the level of their own knowledge and skills, and the failure of the intervention and other sources of stress affect the physical and mental health of the counselor, so the counselor should follow the principle of stress management from the three aspects of the pressure intermediary subsystem: cognitive system, social support system, biological immune system to carry out stress management and regulation, in order to adjust their psychological state and better participate in psychological crisis intervention.

Psychological crisis refers to a state of intense psychological imbalance that occurs when an individual faces strong life stimuli and their resources and coping strategies cannot be resolved. Individuals in a state of strong imbalance, if not detected in a timely manner and given appropriate intervention measures, may trigger an individual suicide crisis. Psychological crisis intervention in universities is to provide timely psychological assistance to students who are in a state of psychological crisis, in order to prevent irrational behavior caused by excessive emotions.

The composition of the psychological crisis intervention group in universities mainly includes student work departments of various departments and psychological health education and counseling centers. The student affairs department of the department organizes student counselors to be specifically responsible for implementing crisis intervention work in the department, preventing, handling, monitoring, and reporting information on student psychological crisis events. Experts and full-time teachers in the field of psychological counseling and treatment at the Mental Health Education and Counseling Center make judgments, evaluations, and provide intervention recommendations when necessary. In addition, under the guidance of the Student Affairs Office, each department organizes the establishment of student psychological committees and secondary psychological station student

cadres in each class of the department as supplements. After regular training, they also play a certain auxiliary role in monitoring, predicting, and providing support in psychological crisis intervention.

The three major groups mentioned above, as well as related groups, generally belong to university psychological crisis intervention personnel. The existence of a student psychological backbone team in psychological crisis intervention is an important team that plays a role in mutual assistance among students and directly and closely acts on specific students. However, due to the special nature of its student population, there are certain limitations in terms of motivation, professional ability, etc., so it can only be used as a special entry point for psychological crisis intervention assistance. The organization of mental health education and counseling centers usually undertakes a wide range of psychological screening and mental health education work, mainly serving the psychological health education and crisis intervention work throughout the school from the perspective of professional top-level design. Compared with the above two, counselors also have unique advantages in participating in college students' psychological crisis intervention work: they generally have a shorter working time, are slightly older than college students, have enthusiasm and patience for work, and are friendly to students; Having just gone through the university stage, I have a good understanding of the thoughts and psychological conditions of college students, and can take the initiative in psychological education work. The counselor group has the identity of a teacher and is the group of teachers who have the most daily contact and communication with students. They are the main bearers of frontline psychological crisis intervention work in universities. Therefore, it is necessary to sort out and guide the stress sources of this group in the context of psychological crisis intervention, and timely carry out corresponding stress management to adjust their own psychological state.

2. ANALYSIS OF SOURCES OF STRESS FOR COLLEGE COUNSELORS IN THE CONTEXT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS INTERVENTION

Psychological stress refers to the comprehensive and tense state of mind that an individual experiences due to stressors. And stressors refer to all stimuli that trigger an individual's stress response, including things beyond the individual's coping ability. After passing through the mediation system, stressors can produce clinical stress reactions. Excessive stress can lead to adverse emotional reactions such as anxiety and restlessness, which may reflect symptoms under stress. These physical and mental reactions are indirect manifestations of stress.

In recent years, with the rapid development and changes in China's economy and society, a series of social situations have led to psychological abnormalities among some students in some universities. Self harm and suicide incidents among college students have occurred from time to time, and psychological crisis intervention scenarios are widely present in universities. For counselors, the nature of crisis intervention work, the status of crisis intervention targets, and the consequences of crisis intervention failure are the main sources of stress. Due to the suddenness, urgency, and risk nature of psychological crisis intervention work, in principle, counselors need to be on standby 24 hours a day, ready to intervene, guide, and provide assistance at any time. Once notified by relevant departments both inside and outside the school, counselors need to quickly go to the scene to handle the situation, and often face critical situations of injury or self harm. At this point, the counselor needs to report to superiors and relevant personnel in the psychological center within a short period of time, communicate with parents and relevant students, and quickly process the information obtained to make decisions.

From the perspective of the object of intervention, it is often in an extremely sensitive and easily provoked state. Counselors, as non professional psychological counselors, often fail to grasp the scale of solving students' psychological problems when dealing with them. They must be extremely cautious at all times to avoid tragedies caused by their own deviations in intervention and intervention, which are critical to their lives.

Psychological crisis intervention work involves dealing with people and is full of variables. Although the goal of intervention is to provide appropriate assistance to students to help them get out of an imbalanced state, it does not always achieve ideal results, and there are also many examples of intervention failure. From an external perspective, once a negative outcome occurs, it will have a huge social impact on parents, students, and schools, indirectly exerting significant social pressure on counselors. Counselors who have experienced, witnessed, or encountered extreme situations such as serious injury or death also directly suffer from the strong negative stimuli brought by the event, which may even lead to individual post-traumatic stress disorder. From an internal perspective, some counselors, driven by their personality, emotional state, or strong sense of responsibility, may also attribute the outcome of an event to their own reasons such as insufficient ability, untimely response, and lack

of in-depth knowledge, thus being trapped in self blame and apology for the tragic consequences of intervention failure.

College counselors are the backbone of students' ideological and political education work, and the core managers of management and service work. From the perspective of job responsibilities and essence, counselors are the guides and mentors for the healthy growth of students in all aspects of carrying out the "three pronged education" for college students. Their unique job responsibilities and career positioning result in a heavy and diverse workload, unclear job boundaries, and weak professionalism, as well as a lack of social and professional identity that counselors cannot ignore when they are on duty.

3. PRINCIPLES OF STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR COLLEGE COUNSELORS

The so-called stress management refers to the process in which individuals actively adopt reasonable coping measures before or after the occurrence or formation of stress within a certain period of time, in order to effectively alleviate or reduce stress and adapt to stress. This kind of stress management is actually a proactive and effective means of coping. In the context of work or psychological crisis intervention practice, if college counselors can maintain good stress management abilities, respond correctly under the principles of identification, balance, disposal, and positivity, promote their personal life harmony, and make the team more aware, responsive, and combat effective.

3.1 Identification principles

Firstly, it is necessary to be aware of and recognize pressure. There are three levels of perception of immediate stress from low to high: the chaotic emotions caused by slightly higher stress tolerance; The pressure that is more tolerable brings physical discomfort; Excessive pressure far beyond one's ability to bear can lead to narrowing of consciousness, slow response, and imminent physical and mental breakdown. The human body has an absorption buffering mechanism for stress, and a small and appropriate amount of stress can be converted into beneficial vitality and passion by the body. However, what we should recognize and be alert to is excessive stress of the above-mentioned level. In addition to sudden excessive stress, it is also important to pay attention to sustained low levels of stress, as it may cause the body to regulate abnormally and lead to physical reactions.

3.2 Balance principle

Psychological and physical stress are correlated, and as physical stress increases, mental stress also gradually increases, and vice versa. So, when facing pressure, counselors can release physical pressure through actions to alleviate psychological stress, and the relaxation of the body can drive the relaxation of the mind in order to achieve a balanced state.

3.3 Disposal principles

Learn and master techniques for dealing with stress, and be able to apply them to daily practice, such as writing stress diaries, biofeedback, muscle relaxation training, meditation and imagination, countdown relaxation, self hypnosis, one minute relaxation techniques, etc.

3.4 Principle of positivity

Maintain the correct attitude towards coping, including facing pressure with positive cognition and mentality. Correct cognition can improve a person's ability to withstand stress and reduce the adverse effects of stress.

4. STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR COLLEGE COUNSELORS IN THE CONTEXT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS INTERVENTION

Based on the above analysis of the sources of stress and stress management strategies for the group of university counselors, and based on the stress process model of the stress source transmitted to the clinical phase through the improvement mediation system, the three subsystems of the mediation system have two functions of increasing or decreasing the intensity of stress response. Therefore, the self stress management strategies of counselors can

mainly start from improving the sources of stress and the three major stages of the mediation system: cognitive system, social support system, and biological immune system.

College counselors serve as frontline responders in psychological crisis intervention, addressing student emergencies such as suicidal ideation, acute stress reactions, and severe mental health decompensation. While their role is critical to maintaining campus safety and student well-being, the high-stakes nature of crisis work exposes counselors to significant occupational stress, including emotional exhaustion, vicarious trauma, role ambiguity, and the pressure of making rapid, consequential decisions. Effective stress management strategies are therefore essential not only for safeguarding counselor well-being but also for ensuring the quality and sustainability of crisis intervention services. This study explores the stress management strategies employed by college counselors within the context of psychological crisis intervention, drawing on occupational stress theory and the job demands-resources model to understand the interplay between stressors and coping mechanisms. The research identifies a range of strategies operating at both individual and organizational levels. At the individual level, counselors benefit from clinical supervision, peer consultation, mindfulness practices, and the establishment of clear professional boundaries. At the organizational level, effective stress management requires institutional commitment to manageable caseloads, access to mental health resources for staff, structured crisis protocols, and a supportive culture that normalizes help-seeking among professionals. The findings suggest that a comprehensive, multi-level approach—one that integrates personal resilience-building with systemic institutional support—is most effective in mitigating burnout and sustaining counselor effectiveness in crisis intervention roles. By prioritizing these strategies, universities can foster a healthier work environment for counselors and, in turn, enhance the quality of psychological support available to students.

4.1 Optimize work and lifestyle, regulate stress source intensity

Scientific time management, balancing work and life. The effective use of time directly affects the work efficiency of counselors. Scientific time management can alleviate the workload of college counselors to a certain extent. The specific steps include determining effective goals, arranging tasks reasonably according to the context of tasks, granting appropriate authorization, and managing time appropriately. In addition, a certain amount of time should be reserved for theoretical and practical learning, combined with reflection and summary of past work, to promote the personal growth and progress of counselors, continuously improve their professional skills and coping abilities, in order to apply what they have learned and efficiently handle various affairs.

Establish channels for collecting psychological warning information from students and timely monitor the dynamics of key students. Collect and grasp detailed dynamics through peer and other channels, predict, analyze, and judge the causes, scale, frequency, intensity, impact consequences, and development and change patterns of students' psychological crises early based on warning indicators, intervene early, and effectively prevent incidents of injury and self harm. Transforming passivity into proactivity can to some extent reduce the pressure on college counselors to deal with sudden crisis events passively.

4.2 Optimize cognitive system and weaken stress response intensity

Improve cognitive level, correctly assess stress and coping ability. Counselors need to fully recognize this rule: excessive stress may directly lead to tension, anxiety, and related physical symptoms, but moderate stress is beneficial as it can motivate people and keep them alert to cope with various situations in the task. The heavy workload and urgent tasks are objective realities. If work is regarded as a key link in cultivating moral character in higher education, one can realize self-worth through work. By adopting positive cognition and adjusting motivational needs to the level of spiritual pursuit, pressure can be transformed into positive motivation for progress to a certain extent.

Strengthen psychological regulation and emotional control abilities. Based on one's own psychological characteristics, level, and patterns, learn to effectively regulate one's psychological state and emotions, and maintain an optimistic and good mood and emotions. Student work is complex and tedious, with a wide range of responsibilities. Among them, psychological crisis intervention targets are sensitive and require counselors to invest a lot of energy and time. In order to better handle this job, college counselors should adjust their psychological state at any time, maintain a sense of nobility in their profession, and always embrace the spirit of love, dedication, love, and dedication in their work.

Accurately evaluate one's own abilities and psychological characteristics. Counselors need to have a relatively objective and comprehensive understanding of themselves, and must evaluate their individual abilities reasonably before making judgments and decisions in their work. When dealing with crisis events, it is often necessary to deal with unexpected situations that ordinary people may not anticipate, and sometimes even involve life and death. It is required that college counselors must have a clear approach to handling them. Strengthen learning and exercise in daily work, gradually adapt to tasks, and not rush to achieve results. Utilize advantages based on objective and comprehensive self-awareness. At the same time, it is necessary to understand and improve personal personality traits, leverage strengths, and address weaknesses in order to improve work and mitigate stress reactions. For example, individuals with competitive personality traits should promote their strengths that encourage continuous improvement, but at the same time, they also need to intentionally improve their shortcomings of being eager for success; For idealists who take on tasks and must achieve them perfectly, it is necessary to arrange affairs reasonably according to time, ability, and the urgency of work, correctly understand the reasonable existence of errors and failures, and reduce the pressure caused by unreasonable demands and expectations on oneself; When facing conflicts, the first choice is to suppress one's own needs, and one should consciously learn to speak out in the group, express their true demands, and release pent up emotions.

4.3 Building and maintaining social support channels

Build harmonious relationships between teachers, students, and colleagues, and maintain personal social networks. College counselors can engage in a certain degree of appropriate self exposure when interacting and communicating with students and colleagues in their daily work, in order to clarify their roles and gain their understanding. At the same time, they can maintain their original personal life circle in order to obtain good social support in both the workplace and daily life. Social support includes trust support and social member support that can help alleviate emotions by gaining confidence and a sense of belonging, tool support for problem-solving, and information support. Its energy indirectly affects stressors and cognitive systems, and has a buffering effect on the course of stress responses.

4.4 Exercise combined with diet to enhance immune system function

In recent years, among the ten standards for measuring health proposed by the World Health Organization, long-term regular physical exercise and reasonable dietary nutrition are the most important guarantees for achieving these standards. Exercise can promote the synthesis of serotonin and dopamine. Moderate physical exercise not only strengthens the body, but also has the effect of relaxing stress and soothing emotions. Good physical quality is not only the foundation of life but also the necessity for college counselors to adjust their psychological burden and work hard with pressure in crisis intervention. At the same time, scientific dietary habits and a reasonable diet can effectively enhance the immune system function and provide a basic guarantee for coping with stress.

5. CONCLUSION

Soviet educator Lev Vygotsky once said, "Teachers should be good at mastering themselves and restraining themselves is the most necessary ability. It is not only related to the teacher's work achievements, but also to their own health." The author fully agrees with this. University counselors should pay attention to themselves, their physical and mental health, and the various challenges and pressures brought by their work while focusing on the safety and development of students in psychological crisis intervention and other work. They should respond with a proactive attitude, adjust their energy and emotions, enhance their confidence and psychological qualities, and then invest in student work in a better state.

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