

Causes and Intervention of Adolescent Anxiety

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Abstract: Nowadays, the problem of adolescent anxiety has become a common social phenomenon, and it is also a hot topic of social concern. Some researchers have found that parenting style and excessive academic pressure have a significant impact on adolescent anxiety, but the underlying mechanism and influence range are still lacking a unified explanation. Therefore, this study explores the causes of adolescent anxiety by collecting and analyzing data, studying the characteristics of adolescents themselves, and also proposes two intervention methods, cognitive behavioral therapy and psychoanalysis, to treat adolescent anxiety. Through analysis and research, it is found that maladaptive parenting styles and excessive academic pressure can lead to anxiety disorders in adolescents. But if the teen already has anxiety, there are interventions through CBT and psychoanalysis. But in fact, the causes and intervention methods of adolescent anxiety are definitely not limited to these, and special research can be carried out in the future.

Keywords: Adolescent, anxiety disorder, cognitive behavior therapy, treatment, psychoanalysis.

1. Introduction

In recent years, adolescent mental health has garnered significant social attention, particularly concerning issues such as anxiety and depression. The prevalence of depression in adolescents is between 15 and 20 percent, with approximately 50% of these individuals being enrolled in school, while 41% have withdrawn from their studies due to depressive symptoms. This high incidence of depression not only impedes the healthy development of adolescents but also precipitates numerous personal tragedies, presenting a formidable challenge for families, educational institutions, and educators alike. Consequently, it is imperative to investigate the psychological factors underlying youth mental health issues. This paper aims to examine and analyze the causes of adolescent anxiety with a particular focus on academic pressure. Furthermore, by detailing the factors behind interpersonal relationship and academic pressure, this study discusses and mainly studies two methods to treat adolescent mental illness from various aspects.

2. Main Causes

2.1. Parent-child Relationship

In different families, each parent has different parenting styles. Different parenting styles may result in different characters and temperaments of children. However, parents' maladaptive parenting style is one of the important reasons for teenagers' negative emotions such as anxiety. During adolescence, teenagers' emotions are easily influenced by external factors [1].

At present, children's anxiety symptoms are related to family conflicts and unreasonable parenting styles [2]. There are three types of parenting: authoritative, permissive, and authoritarian [3]. Firstly, authoritarian parents are often characterized by low warmth and high control. Faced with unruly teenagers, they set strict requirements and standards for them. For example, the exam has to be at the top of the class. If the teenager can not do it, these parents will set up severe punishment to pressure the child, even corporal punishment. Because they want to really control the child and force the child to meet the standard of perfection. Over time, the parents' wrong discipline style coupled with the adolescent child's sensitivity, emotional instability, and then the teenager's fear of not meeting the parents' standards, this allows anxiety to form [4]. Secondly, excessive warmth and limited control are common traits of permissive parents. Parents are too tolerant of their children and never give them proper guidance. That way, kids can do whatever they want. However, once in public places such as school, children without unlimited support from parents will be insecure and reluctant to trust anyone. They will have serious anxiety about study and life. Thirdly, authoritative parents usually adopt positive supportive parenting styles, such as warmth and support, that the parents know and predict positive developmental outcomes, such as higher academic achievement. This is the adaptive parenting style and will not cause teenagers to suffer from anxiety disorders, this is a study based on the influence of parenting styles on adolescents' social adjustment [4].

Moreover, Studies have found that parents who often express their anxiety in front of teenagers tend to increase their anxiety. In other words, to a large extent, children's anxiety or other bad emotions are likely to be learned from their parents' behavior and upbringing. Because children's emotions are "shaped" by their parents [2]. If they encounter family conflicts, they will become sensitive and impulsive and will suffer from anxiety symptoms to a large extent.

Parents' maladaptive parenting style and maladaptive guidance will eventually cause teenagers to suffer from anxiety disorders.

2.2. Academic Pressure

2.2.1. Internal Reasons

Firstly, high school students in China are required to study nine subjects, and the substantial homework load significantly heightens both their academic and psychological pressures. Furthermore, upon entering high school, the complexity of courses gradually intensifies compared to middle school, leading to increased demands on students' self-directed learning abilities. However, many students struggle to keep pace with the curriculum, resulting in difficulties comprehending material during class. Inadequate completion of assignments can lead to declining grades over time, ultimately eroding confidence and exacerbating psychological stress. Teenagers with poor academic performance are vulnerable to peer pressure in the campus environment, and they are prone to feelings of inferiority, anxiety, and fear in their studies. At the same time, their academic failures also make them vulnerable to peer review and rejection [5]. The study found that academic pressure has a significant influence on adolescents' problem behavior, with a total effect of 0.19 ($p < 0.001$) and a direct effect of 0.14 ($p < 0.001$) [5]. By this experiment, it proved that academic pressure has a significant influence on adolescents' problem behavior. That is, the greater the academic pressure,

the higher the risk of adolescents' problem behavior. At present, China's education model is still exam-oriented education. High school students often adopt a competitive mindset, striving to surpass their peers through hard work. While this approach may yield short-term benefits, its long-term negative repercussions can be significant; it leads to self-exhaustion and an inability to confront the disparities with others directly. For some high-achieving students, they consistently ranking among the top performers fosters excessive concern about their peers' achievements, resulting in a reluctance to relax. This prolonged state of tension contributes to heightened anxiety. As students gradually lose focus, their experience falls behind, impairing their ability to think normally. They become concerned about being surpassed by others and worry about the potential consequences for themselves. Over time, an academically excellent student develops to the point where he is unable to maintain normal learning. There are also some students who pursue perfectionism, which leads to students' fear of failure, too much psychological burden, fear of failure, depression by their irrational cognition, and doubt their ability.

2.2.2. External Reasons

Middle school students are faced with fierce academic competition. Important examinations such as the college entrance examination determine the path to study and the future development of students, and the employment also attaches great importance to academic qualifications, and the fierce social competition leads to the huge academic pressure of many students. The study indicates that both educators and parents maintain elevated expectations for academically successful adolescents, consistently establishing ambitious goals, which contributes to increased academic pressure. A small number of students' families are poor and their parents have difficulty making money, but they strongly support their children to study, no matter how tired and busy they are. They insist that their children only study and do not do housework. Frequent reminders for children to study diligently may lead to anxiety during exams, as they worry about underperforming and feel a sense of guilt towards their family for potentially disappointing results. It is necessary for parents to create conditions for children's study, like create a good growth environment, provide children with the necessary life and learning necessities, but doing too much will only backfire and increase the invisible pressure on the child. And in order to get good grades, children will participate in various after-school classes, which increases their learning burden and time pressure, resulting in a serious imbalance between study and rest time.

2.3. Intervention Modes

2.3.1. Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT)

At present, CBT is the most appropriate treatment for adolescents. Studies have shown that CBT can be effective in treating anxiety without the need for any medication. This greatly avoids the side effects of treatment.

Through cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), the therapist helps the adolescent understand how their thoughts and behaviors combine to cause anxiety. Therapists make an effort to step in by teaching relaxation techniques, altering harmful thought patterns, and modifying actions that exacerbate the issue.

2.3.1.1. Changing Negative Mind Set

Adolescents must comprehend the connection between ideas, feelings, and behaviors before they can effectively alter unfavorable thoughts. The therapist provides examples and discusses examples from personal experiences that may be helpful.

Teens are asked to identify their thoughts through exercises and then complete a thought journal as a homework assignment. A thought journal asks them to describe the situation they experienced, record their thoughts in the situation, and then the results (actions and emotions). Without practicing identifying how ideas and feelings are connected, the most crucial ideas will go unnoticed and unchallenged. In this case, teens should focus their attention on the thoughts that cause anxiety.

In practice, it is difficult for teenagers to change their negative emotions in the long term, but at least, through this series of activities, they can learn about their own behavior and thoughts.

While they recognize their negative feelings, have them try to make changes. Therapist can let teenagers think more about what they are interested in, write down happy things, and divert their attention.

2.3.1.2. Exposure Therapy & Systematic Desensitization

Exposure therapy is one of the most common CBT methods used to treat anxiety disorders [6]. The basic idea of exposure therapy is to confront the fears. When a person exposes themselves to the source of the anxiety and nothing bad happens, the anxiety is lessened. If the teenager is anxious about the test, let him stay in the test environment all day, also known as "flooding."

Determining one's level of fear is the first stage in the systematic desensitization process. The therapist first determines the fears you would like to work through with your adolescent, after which they compile a list of actions and order them according to perceived anxiety generating.

Finally, teenagers will follow a fear scale, with the goal of exposing teens to stimuli that produce only moderate anxiety when using relaxation techniques to manage the emotions and responses. Moreover, Teens can now advance to more difficult scenarios that they have marked on their fear scale.

In the short term, the study found, CBT is shorter and less medication-intensive, making it more effective than waiting or not. As a result, CBT can help adolescents with anxiety issues [7].

2.3.2. Psychodynamic

Child and adolescent psychodynamic psychotherapy(CAPP) is a manualized, time-limited psychodynamic psychotherapy with twice weekly sessions, for children ages 8 to 16 years old with primary DSM-IV-TR: GAD, social phobia, or separation anxiety disorder. CAPP is made up of 20 to 24 sessions divided into three phases [8].

The therapeutic relationship is designed to help the child improve his or her capacity to reflect and better investigate and understand symptoms by beginning to articulate and explore underlying psychological meanings associated with them [8]. The researchers hypothesized that the anxiety symptoms had a specific psychological meaning by exploring the dynamics of the child's life, they combine the potential danger with it, let the child adapt to the situation as early as possible, and establish a more appropriate mechanism to help them deal with emotional conflict, so as to alleviate the anxiety caused by future situations. Here is an experimental example, Max was a 16 year old boy of high academic achievement, from a professional family, who presented with symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder (6/8), social phobia (5/8), and dysthymia (4/8) on ADIS-C/P. PARS=22. The treatment entered the termination phase, and max reported feeling "a lot better." There was a mild reemergence of original symptoms of fatigue, insomnia, conflicts at home and avoidance of social interactions. During this phase the subject of the loss of his therapist was highlighted and discussed. Max's anxiety remitted with therapy [8]. But the CAPP approach works better for parents, helping teachers understand this issue and how to deal with it can make a big difference because anxious kids are not aising their hands to ask for help when they don't understand something or to contribute their ideas, which negatively affects their academic progress [9]. Compared to teachers,

children may be more inclined to rely on trusting family members, and parents are better able to understand their children's situation, understand their needs, and stay with their children for longer, and can better observe. Parents should avoid placing excessive pressure on their children and instead focus on adjusting their own mindset. Children are sensitive to the expectations and anxieties of their parents, which may deter them from exploring new opportunities for fear of disappointing their parents. This constraint can hinder their growth and development, leading to increased anxiety. Parents should acquire the skills to effectively convey their concern and back for their children, thereby fostering a nurturing and healthy circumstance conducive to the development of their teenagers.

3. Discussion and Suggestion

3.1. Overall Conclusions from Current Research

Adolescence is a critical period marked by significant physiological and psychological changes, making it a high-risk time for the development of anxiety. The research indicates that various factors contribute to adolescent anxiety, including interpersonal relationships, particularly the parent-child dynamic, and academic pressures. Authoritarian and permissive parenting styles can lead to different manifestations of anxiety, with the former potentially instilling fear of failure and the latter leading to insecurity and difficulty in trust. Additionally, the impulsive and sensitive nature of adolescent emotions makes them susceptible to external influences, which can exacerbate anxiety.

Academic pressure is another significant contributor, with high expectations from parents and teachers, as well as peer comparisons, leading to stress and anxiety. The research by Jiang highlights how academic performance can influence the level of anxiety, with both high-achieving and underperforming students facing unique challenges.

3.2. Recommendations/Insights Based on Conclusions

Based on the above, here are some recommendations about the way of decrease the anxiety.

Parental education and support play a pivotal role in fostering a teenagers' mental health and scholastic attainment. By equipping parents with the knowledge and skills to understand and respond to their children's emotional needs, they can create a supportive home environment that encourages resilience and self-esteem. This support can be further enhanced through school-based interventions, which are designed to address the specific needs of students within the educational setting. These interventions may include peer support programs, counseling services, and classroom-based activities that promote emotional well-being and social skills.

CBT is a widely recognized therapeutic approach that has been proven effective in treating anxiety and other mental health issues. CBT can assist students in developing coping strategies that improve their abilities by teaching them to identify and challenge negative thought patterns.

Psychodynamic therapy, on the other hand, delves into the unconscious mind to explore the root causes of emotional distress. This form of therapy can be particularly useful for students who may be struggling with deep-seated issues that affect their ability to learn and engage with their peers.

In recent years, online training programs have emerged as a powerful tool for reaching a broader audience and providing flexible, accessible support. These digital platforms offer a range of resources, including webinars, interactive modules, and self-paced courses that can be tailored to the needs of educators and students alike. As suggested by the American Psychological Association in 2019, such programs can be instrumental in equipping teachers with the necessary tools to identify signs of anxiety in students and provide appropriate support. This not only aids in the academic progress of the students but also contributes to their overall well-being, creating a positive impact on their educational journey and future prospects.

3.3. Future Research Directions

Longitudinal Studies: Future research should concentrate on longitudinal studies to understand the long-term effects of different parenting styles and academic pressures on adolescent mental health.

Cultural Differences: Exploring how cultural differences influence the manifestation and treatment of adolescent anxiety could provide insights into culturally sensitive interventions.

Technology and Anxiety: With the increasing use of technology, research into the role of digital media in adolescent anxiety and potential digital therapeutic interventions is warranted.

Early Intervention: Studies on early identification and intervention strategies for anxiety in younger children could help prevent the escalation of anxiety into adolescence.

By addressing the multifaceted causes of adolescent anxiety through a combination of educational, therapeutic, and systemic interventions, studies can support the healthy growth and development of young people, equipping them with the tools to manage stress and anxiety effectively.

4. Conclusion

This study delves into the causes of adolescent anxiety and its interventions, providing a multidimensional perspective for understanding this complex phenomenon. Reviewing the research theme, adolescence is a period full of physical and psychological changes that make adolescents more susceptible to anxiety. Summarizing the findings of the study, the paper found that parent-child relationship and academic stress are the two main factors that contribute to adolescent anxiety. In particular, parents' parenting styles, whether too strict or too tolerant, can have a detrimental effect on adolescent mental health. At the same time, academic stress, including expectations from school and family, as well as the reality of social competition, are also a significant source of anxiety for adolescents.

In summarizing the recommendations/takeaways presented in this article, the authors emphasize the importance of parent education and advocate for parents to learn how to better understand and support their children. In addition, CBT and psychodynamic therapy have been shown to be effective treatments that can help adolescents identify and change negative thought patterns, thereby reducing anxiety. This study also advocates for the use of online training programs to provide educators with the necessary tools and resources so they can better identify and support youth with anxiety.

The implications of this study are presented as not only providing insights into understanding adolescent anxiety, but also practical intervention strategies for parents, educators, and mental health professionals. By implementing these strategies, educators can more effectively support teens' mental health and help them build resilience to cope with stress and anxiety. In addition, this study also points to the direction of future research, including the long-term impact of different educational styles, cultural differences, the role of digital media, and the further exploration of early intervention strategies. In order to support teenagers' general wellbeing and capacity for development, these research avenues will advance the understanding of teenage anxiety and help create better preventative and therapeutic strategies.

Authors Contribution

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

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