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# How Mental Health Courses Affect Emotional Adaptation of College Students

Jingyuan Liu

Center for Counselling and Psychological Development, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China

**Email address:**

liujy2020@mail.tsinghua.edu.cn

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**Abstract:** *Background:* With the increasing number of psychological problems of contemporary college students, the level of mental health and the quality of psychological literacy need to be improved. Mental health courses are generally considered to be one of the effective ways to improve the mental health level of college students and promote their harmonious development of body and mind because of their advantages of strong systematicness and wide coverage. *Objective:* The study explored the influence of mental health courses form on emotional adaptation of college students and the chain mediating effect of social adaptation, self-efficacy and self-esteem. *Methods:* The scales about emotional adjustment, social adaptation, self-efficacy and self-esteem were used to measure in the group counseling course (21 students) and the traditional teacher teaching course (24 students). *Results:* (1) Group counseling course was more effective than teacher teaching course in improving college students' emotional adaptation and social adaptation. (2) Social adaptation, self-efficacy and self-esteem played a chain mediating role in the influence of mental health course form on emotional adaptation. *Conclusion:* The results significantly revealed the effect of different forms of mental health courses and the effect mechanism of mental health course form on college students' emotional adaptation, which can provide an important reference for improving the level of emotional adaptation by increasing the form of group counseling and improving the social adaptation, self-efficacy, self-esteem.

**Keywords:** Mental Health Course, Emotional Adaptation, Social Adaptation, Self-efficacy, Self-esteem

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## 1. Introduction

Group counseling has gradually become a common practice form in mental health education in colleges and universities. It is a form of psychological counseling for groups. It mainly uses the interpersonal interaction within the group to effectively promote members to explore themselves, learn new behaviors, and improve interpersonal relationships. Enhance social adaptability and stimulate psychological potential. Group psychological counseling emphasizes student-centered, breaks through traditions, and adapts to class conditions, avoids one-way theoretical indoctrination and knowledge transfer, and is suitable for the laws of college education and teaching and the laws of physical and mental development of college students [1, 2]. Emotional adaptation refers to the state of psychological and behavioral reactions caused by emotional changes. It is one of the important indicators of students' adaptation in school and one of the important signs of mental health [3].

So can mental health courses effectively improve students' emotional adaptation? Is there a difference between group coaching and teacher teaching? What is the internal mechanism of this process? This study will explore how mental health courses affect college students' emotional adaptation and analyze the roles of social adaptation, self-efficacy, and self-esteem in it.

First, social adaptation refers to an individual's ability to perform professional and social roles, reflecting the individual's interaction with the environment [4]. Interpersonal interaction is the main form in group counseling. On the one hand, groups can also foster cohesion among members, that is, a feeling of being part of a warm, supportive, and comforting relationship. On the other hand, experience in struggle with similar problems is helpful [5, 6]. Therefore, group counseling provides more social support than teacher-led mental health courses, and can improve students' social adaptation.

Second, self-efficacy refers to the belief that an individual

is able to carry out the actions required to obtain the desired results [7]. Studies have shown that there is a correlation between self-efficacy and many aspects of individual mental health. The level of self-efficacy is closely related to the academic achievement and mental health of college students, and is also closely related to the life status and achievement performance of college students after entering the society [8]. Furthermore, the mental health course involves content such as self-awareness and confidence enhancement, which is helpful for enhancing students' self-efficacy and self-esteem. However, studies have confirmed that social support, an important component of social adaptation, can significantly predict self-efficacy [9]. Therefore, different forms of mental health courses may affect self-efficacy through social adaptation.

Third, self-esteem is an individual's attitude toward one's own worth and abilities [10]. Self-esteem is the result of individuals' self-evaluation of their social roles, and is one of the important protective factors for individual social adaptation [11], and also one of the core indicators of mental health [12]. Studies have confirmed that self-esteem and self-efficacy [13] and interpersonal relationships [14] are significantly positively correlated. Therefore, social adaptation has the potential to affect self-esteem through self-efficacy. At the same time, self-esteem is the defense system of the self, which helps individuals adapt to the social and cultural environment, buffers the negative emotions of individuals after experiencing setbacks, and enhances the individual's emotional intelligence by acting on emotion regulation, thereby promoting their overall subjective well-being [15]. Therefore, self-esteem plays an important role in emotional adaptation. Combined with the previous deduction, the following hypothesis is drawn: the form of college students' mental health course affects students' emotional adaptation through the chain mediating effect of social adaptation→self-efficacy→self-esteem.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

According to the students' voluntary course selection, there are 23 students participating in the group counseling class and 26 students participating in the teacher teaching class. After the first class and the last class, students voluntarily filled out the psychological assessment questionnaire, and the data of the students with the two measurements before and after were collected for analysis. In the end, 21 group counseling course data and 24 teacher teaching course data were obtained. Using G\* Power 3.1 to calculate effect sizes for sample sizes [16]: paired-samples *t*-test for statistics, two-tailed, effect size  $d = 0.43$ ,  $\alpha = 0.05$ ,  $1 - \beta = 0.8$ . Of the 45 participants, 33 were male and 12 were female; mean age was  $(18.71 \pm 0.89)$  years. Electronic informed consent was obtained from the participants before the experiment, and the study had been reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of the university where the study was conducted.

### 2.2. Course Provision

Both group counseling course and teacher teaching course focused on the three major themes of self-knowledge, emotion regulation and relationship building, which were closely related to college students' mental health. The main course contents were: 1) course introduction; 2) self-knowledge; 3) emotion management; 4) interpersonal relationship communication; 5) native family; 6) love exploration; 7) career planning; 8) course summary.

### 2.3. Materials

#### 2.3.1. Emotional Adaptation Measurement

Eight items in the emotional adaptation dimension of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) were selected to measure the participants' emotional adaptation [17]. Each item was scored from 1 to 5, where 1 meant completely disagree and 5 meant completely agree, and the total score was used as the emotional adaptation level.

#### 2.3.2. Social Adaptation Measurement

Six items in the social adaptation dimension of the SACQ were selected to measure the participants' social adaptation [17]. Each item was scored from 1 to 5, which was the same as the scoring method for measuring emotional adaptation. Items 3 and 4 were scored in reverse, and the total score was used as the social adaptation level.

#### 2.3.3. Self-efficacy Measurement

The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) was used to measure the self-efficacy [18]. There were 10 items in this scale, and each item was valued from 1 (completely incorrect) to 4 (completely correct). The total score was taken as the self-efficacy level of the students.

#### 2.3.4. Self-esteem Measurement

Self-esteem was measured using the Self-Esteem Scale (SES) [10]. The scale had a total of 10 items, and each item was scored from 1 to 4, where 1 meant very disagree and 4 meant very agree. The 3rd, 5th, 8th, 9th, and 10th items were scored in reverse, with the total score was used as the self-esteem level.

### 2.4. Procedure

A professional platform called "Sojump" was used to program and run the above scales, which were voluntarily filled out by students at the end of the first and last class.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. The Influence of Course Form on Emotional Adaptation

The paired sample *t*-tests showed that the scores for the group counseling course increased significantly between the pretest and posttest for emotional adaptation ( $M_{pre} = 27.24$ ,  $SD_{pre} = 4.81$ ,  $M_{post} = 31.38$ ,  $SD_{post} = 5.04$ ,  $t(20) = -4.221$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.840$ ), while the students' emotional adaptation

level improved marginally significantly for the teacher teaching course ( $M_{pre} = 27.92$ ,  $SD_{pre} = 4.80$ ,  $M_{post} = 29.75$ ,  $SD_{post} = 5.87$ ,  $t(23) = -1.924$ ,  $P = 0.067$ ,  $d = 0.339$ ).

### 3.2. The Influence of Course Form on Social Adaptation

The paired sample  $t$ -tests showed that both the scores for the group counseling course ( $M_{pre} = 23.33$ ,  $SD_{pre} = 2.94$ ,  $M_{post} = 25.76$ ,  $SD_{post} = 2.77$ ,  $t(20) = -4.075$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.849$ ) and for teacher teaching course ( $M_{pre} = 21.75$ ,  $SD_{pre} = 3.03$ ,  $M_{post} = 23.13$ ,  $SD_{post} = 3.39$ ,  $t(23) = -3.114$ ,  $P = 0.005$ ,  $d = 0.426$ ) increased significantly between the pretest and posttest for social adaptation. Moreover, the independent samples  $t$ -test revealed that the group counseling course scored much higher than the teacher teaching course on the posttest of social adaptation ( $t(43) = 2.829$ ,  $P = 0.007$ ,  $d = 0.851$ ) but not on the pretest ( $t(43) = 1.775$ ,  $P = 0.083$ ,  $d = 0.531$ ).

### 3.3. The Influence of Course Form on Self-efficacy

The paired sample  $t$ -tests showed that both the scores for the group counseling course ( $M_{pre} = 23.95$ ,  $SD_{pre} = 4.47$ ,  $M_{post} = 27.38$ ,  $SD_{post} = 5.83$ ,  $t(20) = -3.474$ ,  $P = 0.002$ ,  $d = 0.649$ ) and for teacher teaching course ( $M_{pre} = 23.46$ ,  $SD_{pre} = 3.84$ ,  $M_{post} = 25.71$ ,  $SD_{post} = 3.97$ ,  $t(23) = -3.560$ ,  $P = 0.002$ ,  $d = 0.575$ ) increased significantly between the pretest and posttest for self-efficacy.

### 3.4. The Influence of Course Form on Self-esteem

The paired sample  $t$ -tests showed that both the scores for the group counseling course ( $M_{pre} = 28.71$ ,  $SD_{pre} = 5.00$ ,  $M_{post} = 32.14$ ,  $SD_{post} = 4.68$ ,  $t(20) = -5.678$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ,  $d = 0.707$ ) and for teacher teaching course ( $M_{pre} = 29.29$ ,  $SD_{pre} = 4.54$ ,  $M_{post} = 31.38$ ,  $SD_{post} = 4.62$ ,  $t(23) = -2.885$ ,  $P = 0.008$ ,  $d = 0.454$ ) increased significantly between the pretest and posttest for self-efficacy. The independent samples  $t$ -tests revealed no significant differences between the group counseling course and the teacher teaching course in the pretest, posttest and change (the difference between the posttest and the pretest) of self-efficacy ( $P > 0.05$ ).

### 3.5. The Influence of Course Form on Emotional Adaptation: The Chain Mediating Effect of Social Adaptation, Self-efficacy and Self-esteem

A chain mediation analysis was conducted (Model 6, based on 5000 bootstrap samples) [19] with Course Form (group vs. teaching) as the independent variable  $X$  (the group counseling course was coded  $X = 1$ , and the teacher teaching course was coded  $X = 2$ ), Emotional Adaptation (the posttest level, continuous variable) as the dependent variable  $Y$ , Social Adaptation (the posttest level, continuous variable) as the mediator  $M1$ , Self-efficacy (the posttest level, continuous variable) as the mediator  $M2$ , and Self-esteem (the posttest level, continuous variable) as the mediator  $M3$ .

The bootstrap results indicated the direct effect of Course Form on Emotional Adaptation was not significant when Social Adaptation and Self-efficacy were included in the model ( $Effect = 0.0484$ ,  $SE = 1.5473$ , 95% CI =  $[-3.0790$ ,

$3.1757]$ ). The chain mediation effect of social adaptation, self-efficacy and self-esteem was significant. The chain mediation effect was generated through the only mediation chain: course form  $\rightarrow$  social adaptation  $\rightarrow$  self-efficacy  $\rightarrow$  self-esteem  $\rightarrow$  emotional adaptation ( $Effect = -0.4521$ ,  $SE = 0.3554$ , 95% CI =  $[-1.6631, -0.0141]$ ).

## 4. General Discussion

### 4.1. Mental Health Course Outcomes: Effects on Emotional Adaptation, Social Adaptation, Self-efficacy, and Self-esteem

For college students, abandoning the original community relationship to develop a new interpersonal relationship is the performance of entering a positive life cycle. During this period, however, young people may experience significant difficulty adjusting [20]. Along the way, in the face of many personal and academic difficulties, college students may be experiencing emotional distress, which may make the adaptation process more difficult [21]. In addition to these difficulties encountered in college life, college students who lack interpersonal interaction may feel deprived and gradually withdraw from their social environment [22]. The present study found that both group counseling and teacher teaching mental health courses can improve students' social adaptation, which provides empirical support for improving students' social adaptation through the establishment of mental health courses, thereby reducing emotional adaptation difficulties and entering a positive life cycle.

The present study also found that group counseling can improve students' social adaptation better than teacher teaching courses, which is consistent with previous studies finding that group counseling is beneficial to the establishment of interpersonal support among members and the improvement of social adaptation [5, 6]. Theoretical models of social support point to two key dimensions. The first is the structural dimension, including the size of the support network and the frequency of social interactions. The second is the functional dimension, which includes emotional elements (eg, receiving and giving love, compassion) and instrumental elements (eg, giving time, gifts, and quantifiable help) [23]. In contrast, group counseling mental health courses are student-centered, emphasizing interpersonal interaction among students, and providing the functional dimension of social support; while teacher teaching courses are teacher-centered, students passively listen to the course, and provide structural dimensions of social support. Research has found that the quality of relationships (the functional dimension) is a better predictor of health than the number of relationships (the structural dimension) [24]. This is also consistent with the findings of the present study that group counseling mental health courses are more conducive to improving students' social adaptation and other mental health indicators.

In addition, the present study also found that group counseling and teacher teaching mental health courses have

an impact on students' self-efficacy and self-esteem. On the one hand, these results confirmed the effect of group counseling and teacher teaching mental health courses on improving students' self-efficacy and self-esteem, which is consistent with the goal of mental health education. On the other hand, these findings provide a basis for the subsequent improvement of students' self-efficacy and self-esteem through mental health education.

#### **4.2. Chain Mediating Effect of Social Adaptation, Self-efficacy and Self-esteem in the Relationship Between Course Form and Emotional Adaptation**

The present study found that group counseling mental health courses significantly improved students' emotional adaptation, while teacher teaching mental health courses had no such effect. At the same time, the present study found the chain mediating effect of social adaptation, self-efficacy, and self-esteem in the relationship between course form and emotional adaptation. Adaptation is the process of adapting to changes in objects by enriching or developing the actions of the subject [25]. The dynamic psychological process of emotional adaptation is formed when students keep their psychology and behavior in harmony with the internal and external environment through active self-adjustment based on their own understanding and experience of changes in the internal and external environment. The results of the present study explain the inherent manifestation of this dynamic process, that is, students form social adaptation through interaction with the environment, and then feel self-efficacy, experience higher levels of self-esteem accordingly, and finally form emotional adaptation. Furthermore, students' adaptation in the college has a significant positive effect on academic performance, and the social adaptation and academic performance of the school can complement each other, further enhancing the motivation of students to participate in school work and develop relationships with peers. The overall psychological quality has gradually entered a stable state. And healthy development, successfully complete learning tasks, and achieve better academic achievement [26]. Furthermore, the findings of the present study suggest that campus activities or courses that develop relationships between students should be supported.

#### **4.3. Implications and Future Research Trends**

First, the results of the present study have proved the effect of different forms of mental health courses of group counseling and teacher teaching, and confirmed the important role of mental health education in enhancing students' social adaptation, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and emotional adaptation. It can enrich the content and fields of school mental health education, and provide empirical evidence for mental health education and intervention.

Second, the present study reveals the internal process of mental health courses in improving college students'

emotional adaptation, enriches the research on the influencing factors of college students' emotional adaptability, and promotes the improvement of college students' social adaptation, self-efficacy, and self-esteem by increasing the form of group counseling. Then it provides an important reference for improving their emotional adaptation level, and provides a reference for the targeted and purposeful psychological counseling work for college students.

Future research can use laboratory manipulation variables to further verify the relationship between the variables found in the present study, thereby confirming the stability of the findings, and providing recommendations for interventions to improve self-efficacy, self-esteem, and emotional adaptation.

## **5. Conclusion**

The present study provides evidence suggesting that the group counseling course was more effective than teacher teaching course in improving college students' emotional adaptation and social adaptation. Social adaptation, self-efficacy and self-esteem played a chain mediating role in the influence of mental health course form on emotional adaptation. The results significantly revealed the effect of different forms of mental health courses and the effect mechanism of mental health course form on college students' emotional adaptation, which can provide an important reference for improving the level of emotional adaptation by increasing the form of group counseling and improving the social adaptation, self-efficacy, self-esteem.

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