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An Exploration of the Role of Group Counseling in Enhancing the Psychological Well-Being of College Students

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Abstract: In contemporary society, university students grapple with multifaceted pressures stemming from academics, daily life, and interpersonal relationships, rendering mental health issues an ever-more paramount social concern. Group counseling, as a collective psychological intervention, holds significant potential in enhancing students' psychological well-being. This study delves into how specific measures, such as augmenting social support, fostering self-awareness, and honing emotional management skills through group counseling, can effectively ameliorate students' psychological states. Concurrently, it outlines a comprehensive set of implementation recommendations. These measures not only equip students with enhanced resilience to navigate academic and life challenges but also cultivate deeper, more positive thinking patterns and an optimistic disposition. By instituting regular assessments and feedback mechanisms on the efficacy of group counseling, the guiding framework can be continuously refined, thereby ensuring a sustained elevation in psychological well-being.

Keywords: group counseling; university students; psychological well-being; social support

1. Introduction

The demographic cohort of university students finds itself at a pivotal juncture in their developmental journey, where they contend not only with academic pressures but also with the transition from familial settings to communal living. Concurrently, the relentless pursuit of higher educational standards by society ushers in escalated expectations and demands, which in turn precipitates the gradual emergence of mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, and social isolation. It is within this context that the imperative of implementing effective psychological intervention measures in institutions of higher learning becomes ever more pronounced. Group counseling emerges as a profoundly efficacious psychological support mechanism, leveraging collective dynamics to fortify students' social support networks and aiding their adept navigation of university life. Through the enhancement of self-awareness, self-worth, and emotional regulation skills achieved via group interaction, this method furnishes innovative paradigms for school-based mental health education. By fostering an environment of empathy and acceptance, students are not only inspired by the narratives of their peers but also learn to better attend to their own psychological well-being through mutual assistance. Consequently, the in-depth exploration of the role of group counseling in augmenting the psychological well-being of university students carries not only theoretical significance but also paramount practical guidance value.

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2. The Theoretical Basis and Principles of Group Counseling

2.1. Basic Concepts of Group Counseling

Group counseling is a psychological intervention approach that fosters support and growth among participants through group activities. As a psychology strategy that integrates group dynamics, group counseling not only focuses on individual development but also emphasizes the enhancement of emotions and intellect through relational interactions in a collective environment. This counseling method is grounded in psychological, educational, and sociological theories, underscoring the power of collectivity and the role of a sense of belonging. The essence of group counseling lies in creating a secure, supportive, and inclusive atmosphere for participants, enabling them to freely express their inner feelings and thoughts. Within such an environment, individuals can gain understanding and feedback from diverse perspectives by sharing their experiences and insights, thus promoting self-reflection and genuine emotional release. The dynamic of the group stems from the interactions among its members, enhancing social connectedness and fostering empathy for each other's experiences through shared life events. The effectiveness of this practice lies in its ability to fulfill fundamental social needs, providing an environment of support and acceptance where participants no longer face challenges alone. Group counseling aids members in bravely confronting psychological and emotional hardships through collective support and encouragement. Additionally, this interactive format allows individuals to understand their place and value within a broader social context, contributing to overall psychological well-being [1].

2.2. The Connotation and Composition of Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being is a multifaceted concept encompassing various dimensions such as emotional, cognitive, and social adaptation. Its essence transcends fleeting moments of joy, manifesting as a lasting sense of internal fulfillment. This sense of well-being includes an overall satisfaction with life, the frequency of positive emotional experiences, and a relative scarcity of negative emotional encounters. It fosters a profound, inner positive evaluation and aspiration toward life. From the perspective of positive psychology, the fundamental components of psychological well-being primarily consist of emotional happiness, cognitive satisfaction, and a sense of meaning. Emotional happiness refers to the ratio of positive to negative emotions that an individual experiences in daily life; cognitive satisfaction pertains more to the contemplation and appraisal of various aspects of one's existence. The sense of meaning, as a crucial factor in enhancing happiness, involves an individual's recognition of their life's purpose and values, which aids in maintaining positivity and resilience when confronted with challenges. For university students, psychological well-being is particularly significant, as they navigate a critical phase of personal development and life choices. Elevated levels of psychological well-being enhance students' adaptability, instilling greater confidence and motivation in addressing academic pressures, interpersonal relationships, and future plans. Within group counseling, the key to fostering psychological well-being lies in nurturing a positive life attitude through collective interaction, establishing social connections, and enhancing self-identity and sense of value. This communal counseling environment not only offers students a platform for self-expression and mutual understanding but also inspires them to pursue a higher quality of life and inner tranquility. Therefore, a profound understanding and effective cultivation of psychological well-being not only influences individual mental health but also contributes to the creation of a more vibrant and supportive learning community.

3. Measures to Improve Psychological Well-Being Through Group Counseling

3.1. Design and Implementation of Group Counseling

Effective group counseling requires not only a meticulously crafted structure but also a remarkable degree of flexibility during implementation to accommodate the diverse needs and dynamically shifting emotional states of students. In the design phase, the clarity of counseling objectives is paramount; these should be articulated in alignment with the students' specific issues and developmental needs, establishing phased goals aimed at enhancing psychological well-being. Such goals ought to encompass aspects such as emotional regulation, self-awareness enhancement, and improvement of interpersonal relationships. During the implementation of group counseling, the counselor's role is of utmost significance. They must possess a profound understanding of psychological principles and keen observational skills, capable of fostering an environment of trust and openness within the group. By facilitating discussions, encouraging participation, and promoting self-expression, the counselor aids students in deriving emotional support and validation from both sharing and listening [2]. The format of counseling can be varied, incorporating discussion sessions, role-playing activities, and thematic workshops. These endeavors not only invigorate student engagement but also effectively hone their communication and problem-solving skills. Throughout the process, it remains essential to assess the emotional fluctuations and psychological responses of each participant, thus allowing for timely adjustments to counseling strategies and ensuring that each member reaps benefits from the experience. This individualized attention fosters a sense of belonging among students within the group, bolstering their confidence in facing challenges. The successful execution of group counseling necessitates a seamless integration of theory and practice, applied with agility in real-world settings. This approach not only enhances students' psychological well-being but also cultivates a more positive and supportive learning environment within the campus. Through effective group counseling, students not only learn to collaborate and support one another but also discover additional avenues for self-actualization through positive interactions.

3.2. Enhancement of Social Support

Social support refers to the emotional, informational, and material assistance that individuals receive from others or their social networks. For university students, such support may emanate from peers, family, mentors, and the broader campus community. The enhancement of social support significantly alleviates the pressures and anxieties encountered by students in both their academic and personal lives, fostering a profound sense of belonging and security. In group counseling, facilitating the development of social support through collective activities and interactions is paramount. Counselors can design initiatives that promote teamwork and trust-building, such as group discussions, collaborative projects, and experiential learning opportunities. These activities encourage students to actively engage, share personal experiences, and articulate their inner confusions, thereby establishing deep emotional connections among their peers. Within these interactions, students not only receive care and understanding from others but also gradually learn how to provide support themselves, cultivating positive patterns of social interaction. Furthermore, the augmentation of social support can be achieved by constructing stable support networks [3]. Group counseling serves as an excellent platform, enabling students to recognize the supportive resources available to them. They begin to understand that their differences are not barriers but rather complementary opportunities. A diverse support network assists university students in obtaining multifaceted help when confronted with setbacks, facilitating personal growth throughout the problem-solving process. The true significance of strengthening social support lies in its capacity to offer students a stable inner resource, enhancing their resilience and adaptability in the face of life's challenges. By establishing and maintaining these social connections, students not

only bolster their psychological well-being but also discover more profound avenues for self-realization, rendering their campus life more enriching and meaningful.

3.3. Enhancement of Self-Awareness and Self-Worth

In this era of rapid development, the formation of self-awareness and the affirmation of self-worth play an indispensable role in the psychological well-being of university students. Self-awareness involves the recognition of one's own characteristics, abilities, needs, emotions, and motivations, while self-worth pertains to the evaluation and identification of one's intrinsic value. The enhancement of these two elements not only facilitates students' clearer understanding of themselves but also equips them with greater confidence and intrinsic motivation when confronting life's challenges. Group counseling provides a secure and supportive environment, encouraging university students to explore their inner worlds more deeply through interactions with others. In these interactions, students can more comprehensively examine their strengths and weaknesses through feedback and mirroring effects from others, gradually deepening their self-cognition. Through role-playing and reflective activities, students can more concretely grasp their positioning in social roles and their influence on others. This deepened self-awareness prompts students to begin focusing on their genuine needs and desires, rather than merely external expectations imposed upon them. Over time, students learn to listen to their inner voices, find a balance between self and the external world, and cultivate a more authentic and steadfast sense of self-worth. The enhancement of self-worth is realized through the achievement, belonging, and recognition they gain within the group. These positive feedbacks help students confirm their uniqueness and irreplaceability, enabling them to possess greater psychological resilience in the face of setbacks. It is worth noting that the activities promoting self-worth in group counseling are not limited to theoretical discussions but should also be combined with practical exercises. Through real-life practice, students can validate their abilities and contributions, thereby strengthening their self-efficacy and confidence. In essence, the enhancement of self-awareness and self-worth is not merely a means to elevate individual psychological well-being but also the fundamental guarantee for their maturation and transition into society. When university students achieve the enhancement of self-awareness and self-worth through group counseling, they will possess greater personal charm and interpersonal skills, laying a solid psychological foundation for their future growth and success. This inner self-power allows them to maintain a positive and optimistic mindset when facing the ever-changing environments and challenges of the future, ultimately achieving a higher quality of life and level of happiness [4].

3.4. Emotion Regulation and Management Skills Development

Contemporary university students are besieged by multifaceted pressures arising from academic demands, employment uncertainties, and social interactions, leading to emotional challenges that significantly impact their mental well-being. In this context, group counseling emerges as an ideal platform to assist students in learning how to regulate and manage their emotions more effectively, thereby enhancing their psychological resilience. The cultivation of emotional regulation skills necessitates an increase in students' awareness of their emotional states. Within group activities, counselors can facilitate self-reflection and emotional journaling, enabling students to attain a clearer understanding of their emotional fluctuations in daily life. Such enhancement of self-awareness empowers students to identify the precursors of negative emotions before they escalate, allowing for timely and effective intervention. This ability to recognize one's emotional landscape not only fosters individual emotional health but also lays the groundwork for nurturing harmonious relationships with others. The development of emotional management skills extends beyond the mere recognition and comprehension of emotions; it also encompasses the effective handling and expression of these feelings. Through simulated scenarios and role-playing in group counseling, students can practice articulating their

emotions in various contexts while learning to employ appropriate communication techniques and conflict resolution strategies. Mastery of these skills can significantly bolster students' sense of self-efficacy and mitigate interpersonal issues stemming from maladaptive emotional regulation. Training in emotional regulation and management skills not only ameliorates students' psychological conditions but also endows them with a proactive mindset in the face of life's pressures. This optimistic outlook proves to be an invaluable asset during the formative years of university, enabling students to maintain inner tranquility and confidence in the face of future adversities and challenges. Through the bridge of group counseling, students can learn from and support one another, while also forging positive emotional connections within the collective, thereby enhancing overall psychological well-being. This virtuous cycle of psychological health not only contributes to individual development but also fosters the creation of a positive campus culture. With systematic training in emotional regulation and management skills, university students will establish a more robust psychological foundation as they pursue a richer and more fulfilling life.

3.5. Establishing Positive Goal-Setting and Action Plans

In group counseling, the establishment of positive goal setting and action plans emerges as an effective method to significantly enhance the psychological well-being of university students. Goal setting not only provides students with a clear sense of direction for the future but also ignites positive emotions and intrinsic motivation, propelling them towards personal growth and development. A well-defined and optimistic goal instills greater drive and passion in students' academic and personal lives, aiding them in overcoming the challenges they face daily. Through group counseling, students can engage in profound self-reflection in a supportive and guiding environment, allowing them to identify objectives that genuinely resonate with their individual aspirations. These objectives should encompass not only academic achievements but also the cultivation of personal interests and the enhancement of interpersonal relationships. As students share and discuss their goals within the group, they can glean insights and perspectives from their peers, fostering a more holistic approach to their endeavors. This interaction not only facilitates the rational establishment of goals but also cultivates a nurturing atmosphere where individuals support one another while also receiving support. Formulating feasible and actionable plans is a crucial step in achieving these goals. Within the group counseling framework, counselors can employ various methodologies, such as the SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound), to assist students in devising comprehensive and pragmatic strategies. Such plans render goals more actionable, providing students with clarity on what actions to undertake at each stage and how to assess their progress. Throughout this process, students develop skills in prioritization and adaptability, which are invaluable for their future endeavors in independently solving complex issues. The practice of positive goal setting and action planning not only amplifies the sense of achievement that accompanies goal completion but also bolsters students' self-efficacy and confidence. Each time a student achieves a minor goal, they experience the joy of success, creating a positive feedback loop that can greatly enhance their psychological well-being. Through collective support and guidance, students are empowered not only to realize their individual aspirations but also to contribute meaningfully to the attainment of shared goals, sharing in the joys and satisfaction of collective success. This interplay between collective honor and personal growth constitutes a rich and fulfilling experience of happiness, enabling university students to stride confidently and composedly towards a promising future [5].

4. Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Group Counseling and Feedback Mechanism

4.1. Regular Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Group Counseling

In the process of group counseling, the regular assessment of effectiveness stands as a pivotal component in ensuring the validity of the counseling programs. Evaluations not only aid in discerning the current methodologies' efficacy, but also furnish a scientific basis for future enhancements and optimizations. When it comes to elevating the psychological well-being of university students, a systematic evaluation mechanism is indispensable, as it authentically reflects the tangible impacts of counseling activities on participants. To commence with the regular assessment of group counseling outcomes, it is essential to delineate clear evaluation criteria. These criteria may encompass improvements in participants' mental health status, enhancements in emotional regulation capabilities, transformations in interpersonal relations, and an amplification of self-awareness. By quantifying these indicators, counselors can acquire objective data that substantiates the entire assessment process, rendering it more reliable. When employing methods such as surveys, interviews, and psychological measurement tools for evaluation, it is imperative to encompass diverse dimensions to ensure a comprehensive understanding of psychological well-being. Beyond quantitative metrics, qualitative assessment holds equal significance. Through in-depth personal interviews or group discussions, counselors can garner nuanced feedback, often illuminating participants' inner feelings, behavioral shifts, and subjective evaluations of the group counseling experience. This direct feedback assists in unearthing subtleties that quantitative data might overlook, thereby providing a rich tapestry of insights and inspirations for the design of counseling activities. The frequency and timing of assessments require meticulous design. An overly frequent evaluation may induce fatigue and resistance among students, while sparse assessments may fail to timely identify issues for adjustment. Ideally, assessment timelines should be flexibly arranged according to the duration of the counseling cycle, maintaining a consistent frequency to ensure the tracking and recording of changing trends. Regular assessment transcends being merely a monitoring tool; it represents an opportunity for reflection and adjustment pertaining to the efficacy of group counseling. Through scientific evaluations, potential issues within the counseling process can be promptly identified, allowing for effective optimizations and adjustments. This dynamic mechanism of feedback and rectification plays a crucial role in enhancing university students' psychological well-being, providing precise and effective support for their physical and mental development. It is through the continual process of self-reflection and improvement that group counseling can genuinely emerge as a powerful instrument for elevating university students' psychological well-being, imbuing their academic journey with deeper significance and value.

4.2. Continuous Improvement of Group Counseling Programs

In the face of the diverse and intricate mental health needs of university students, it is imperative to maintain the dynamic adjustment and optimization of the intervention strategies. This process mandates that counselors continuously reflect on and evaluate their existing methodologies to ensure they genuinely enhance the psychological well-being of participants. The results obtained through feedback mechanisms serve as invaluable foundations for refining the intervention strategies. Feedback is gathered from multiple sources, including direct participant evaluations, the dynamic changes observed by counselors, and periodic assessment data. This information aids in identifying shortcomings within the current strategies, such as the monotony of content, methodological limitations, or a lack of participant interest. Leveraging this knowledge, counselors can make targeted adjustments to both content and activity formats to better engage and meet the students' needs. Throughout this process, innovation and flexibility play pivotal roles. Given the ever-evolving student needs and environmental factors, intervention strategies cannot remain static. For instance, as society progresses and transforms, emerging mental health topics continually arise, necessitating timely updates to the intervention content to

address these challenges. Moreover, technological advancements have introduced new tools and platforms for group counseling, such as online sessions and virtual reality experiences, enriching the content and forms of counseling. Continuous improvement also involves the ongoing study of counseling theories and methods. Through continuous professional training and academic exchange, counselors can acquire the latest psychological research findings and educational technologies, thereby elevating their professional standards and making group counseling more scientific and innovative. This not only enhances the overall quality of the program but also boosts counselors' self-efficacy, indirectly reinforcing the positive impact on university students' mental well-being. This continuous improvement mechanism embodies a long-term commitment to the growth and well-being of participants, not only enhancing the effectiveness of counseling activities but also fostering a lasting educational influence. By maintaining the vibrancy of intervention strategies and the flexibility of tactics, group counseling can more effectively accompany university students through critical life stages, providing robust and dynamic support for their mental health and empowering them to face future challenges.

5. Conclusion

The role of group counseling in enhancing the mental well-being of university students should not be underestimated. Through a variety of specific measures, students' self-awareness, social support, and emotional management skills have been significantly improved. This collective form of psychological intervention not only provides students with a platform for communication and mutual aid but also fosters the development of positive goal setting and practical abilities through collective interactions. In the future, by conducting regular effect assessments and feedback mechanisms, the strategies of group counseling can be continuously adjusted and optimized to better meet the diverse needs of students. It is imperative to address the mental health issues of university students through effective interventions, as it not only concerns individual growth and development but also is crucial for improving educational quality and constructing a harmonious campus. Therefore, universities should continuously explore and practice, integrating group counseling into the campus mental health education system to ensure comprehensive development for students.

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