

The Correlation Between Type C International School Chinese Students' Academic Stress and Their Willingness to Seek Help from School Social-Emotional Counselors in Guangzhou, China

Kairui Ou¹ and Aubrey Scholz[#]

¹Nansha College Preparatory Academy, China

[#]Advisor

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the correlation between academic stress and the willingness of Chinese high school students in Type C International School in Guangzhou, China, to seek help from school social-emotional counselors. Previous research has identified significant mental health issues among Chinese high school students due to high academic stress. Despite similar research on Asian international students in the United States, there is a lack of research targeting Chinese high school students within China. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study surveyed 56 students with the Student Stress Inventory (SSI) and the Willingness to Seek Counseling Scale (WSC) and included two open-ended questions for qualitative insights. The data was analyzed using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient, P-value, and Coding method. The research shows a significant weak positive correlation ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$) between academic stress and willingness to seek counseling. Key factors influencing this relationship included perceived ineffectiveness of counseling, self-reliance, and lack of trust in counselors, with performance pressure, workload concerns, and course difficulty as primary stressors. The findings suggest that although students are willing to seek help under high stress, barriers such as cultural stigma and distrust in counseling services limit actual engagement. Due to the limitations of the correlation method, a cause-and-effect relationship cannot be established; further experiments must be conducted to gain a clearer understanding of this phenomenon. However, this study still provides valuable insights for Chinese educators and policymakers to enhance counseling services, aiming to better support the mental health needs of Chinese high school students.

Introduction

During the period from 2016-2020, Wu and his team (2022) found an increasing mental health issue trend caused by rising academic stress, which has the potential to continue to grow. To prevent further deterioration, the Chinese Education Bureau established policies to improve Chinese public school counseling services (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2018). Despite these efforts, Chinese students' negative attitudes toward counseling and Chinese cultural stigma that were rooted in Chinese society still hindered students from utilizing school counseling services and prevented them from accessing social-emotional support in school when needed (Li et al., 2012; Lim & Lim, 2015).

While prior research examined the relationship between academic stress and students' willingness to seek help from counselors, it focused on the Asian international student population who studied in U.S. colleges (Li et al., 2012). Yet, Chinese high school students, who often encounter the peak of academic stress, are a population that needs to be focused on as this has significant implications for their mental health (João Pires, 2019). Given this gap, a more detailed examination of the correlation between academic stress and the willingness to seek counseling is crucial for

improving the mental health of Chinese high school students, and it will provide essential information for Chinese educators and counseling services to enhance their offerings and better meet the needs of Chinese students. The primary objective of this research is to investigate the correlation between Chinese high school student's academic stress and their willingness to seek counseling using a mixed research method, aiming to close the current literature gap. This study also explores the potential impacts of Chinese high school counseling services to evaluate the effectiveness of these systems and proposes potential improvements to support and enhance Chinese school counseling services. This study selected Chinese students in Type C International schools as participants because these schools serve local students seeking an education system different from their national system and typically offer more stable counseling services compared to Chinese public high schools (Hayden & Thompson, 2013). This paper first provides a literature review, followed by the methodology, results, and discussion with limitations, and finally, a conclusion along with implications, and directions for future research.

Literature Review

Relationship of Chinese High School Students Academic Stress and Mental Health Issues

The increasing academic stress of Chinese high school students indicates an urgent need for counseling services in Chinese high schools, and recent research from the past decades has suggested that the development of mental illness is closely related to increasing academic stress (Liu & Lu, 2011; Wu et al., 2022). In 2011, Liu and Lu, from Zhejiang University, first conducted a study that investigated the relationship between academic stress and depressive symptoms in Chinese high school students using a regression mixture model. They recruited 368 Chinese high school students from two high schools in Jiangsu, China; and a self-generated 7-item academic stress instrument to measure students' academic stress, along with a revised Children's Depression Inventory to assess their depression levels was applied. The final research finding indicates a significant positive relationship between student academic stress and mental health issues, suggesting that Chinese students are more vulnerable to developing depression symptoms while experiencing high academic stress (Liu & Lu, 2011).

Furthermore, a repeated cross-sectional analysis from 2016 to 2020 conducted by Wu et al. (2022) confirms the relationship found by Liu and Lu (2011) regarding academic stress and mental health issues among Chinese high school students. However, compared to previous research done by Liu and Lu (2011), Wu et al.'s participants have higher diversity as their sample has a total of 2837 high school students from Bocai Experimental School in Changsha, Hunan. Participants were administered the Mental Health Inventory of Middle School Students (MMHI-60), which is a validated and authoritative self-report measure of mental health problems, including 10 subscales that each represent a specific mental health problem (Liu et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2022). Based on the research result, Wu et al. indicated a consistent increase in all mental health problems, ranging from 5% to 25%. Specifically, academic stress-related mental health problems show a significant increasing trend as the p-value is smaller than 0.05 among the mental health problems within the measure. After analysis, Wu et al. have identified that the increase in academic stress due to COVID-19 is a contributing factor, as class effectiveness was negatively impacted and competition among Chinese students remained high during the school closure affected by COVID-19. This is also supported by Chen et al.'s (2024) research that focused on Chinese students' academic stress tendencies during COVID-19.

Both articles conducted scholarly investigations into the relationship between academic stress and mental health issues in Chinese high school students. Liu and Lu's (2011) study affirmed the presence of such a relationship. Subsequently, Wu and his team (2022) further confirmed the link between academic stress and mental health using new data. Although both studies primarily sampled students from a single province in China, the results may not be representative of all Chinese adolescents due to regional differences in education regulations. However, since Chinese public schools share a common education structure, the positive relationship between academic stress and mental health observed in two major provinces from 2011 to 2020 suggests that this trend is likely to apply to a broader

population of Chinese students across the country. This trend contributes to rising mental health symptoms and, in some instances, to formal mental illness diagnoses in Chinese high school students.

Willingness to Seek Help from a Social-Emotional Counselor

Regarding willingness to seek help from school counseling services, several factors that influence the willingness of Asian students to seek counseling have been identified in previous research, including cultural values and academic stress (Kim & Omizo, 2003; Li et al., 2012). In the early 2000s, Kim and Omizo first conducted a correlation study on how Asian cultural values affect Asian Americans' counseling willingness. Within this research, 242 college students participated, and two instruments were utilized. The Asian Values Scale (AVS) was applied to assess participant's adherence to Asian cultural values (Kim et al., 1999). The Willingness to Seek Counseling Scale (WSC) is utilized to measure one's willingness to consult a counselor for a defined set of issues (Gim et al., 1990). The research result indicates an inverse relationship: as adherence to Asian values increased, willingness to seek counseling decreased (Kim & Omizo, 2003). Moreover, Kim and Omizo found that encouraged by Asian values, Asian American students will likely withhold their pain rather than discuss it with a professional counselor. Additionally, the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale-Short Form (ATSPPH-SF) within this study confirms that Asian values negatively impact students' attitudes toward counseling and their help-seeking willingness (Kim & Omizo, 2003).

However, Li et al. (2012) from Indiana University Bloomington conducted a study with findings that opposed Kim and Omizo's (2003) finding, while Li et al.'s research had an additional variable: students' academic stress. The study involved 177 Asian international students from a public U.S. university. It also utilized the ATSPPH-SF and WSC scales that Kim and Omizo had previously applied. Additionally, Li et al. incorporated the College Stress Inventory (CSI) to measure stress levels and examine the relationship between academic stress and Asian international students' willingness to seek counseling. Differing from Kim and Omizo's earlier findings, their results showed no significant relationship between counseling attitudes and willingness to seek help. However, Li et al. did identify a positive relationship between academic stress and willingness to seek counseling, with a statistically significant p-value below 0.05, indicating that higher stress levels may increase the students' willingness to seek counseling support.

Summary

Previous studies have consistently shown that Chinese high school students experience high levels of academic stress and a positive relationship exists between academic stress and mental health problems (Zhao et al., 2015; Choy & Alon, 2018; Su & Liu, 2020; Wu et al., 2022; Wu & Zhang, 2023; Zhou et al., 2023). In addition, previous research has explored Asian student's willingness to seek counseling services and its relationship toward academic stress (Kim & Omizo, 2003; Li et al., 2012). However, there is no research examining the correlation between academic stress and counseling willingness specifically focused on Chinese high school students' population. As Chinese high school students face a heightened risk of mental health problems under high academic stress, barriers to seeking counseling help can prevent them from accessing crucial support, which potentially worsens their mental health issues. This situation represents an urgent concern in China. Therefore, the research question was formed: What is the correlation between Type C international school Chinese students' academic stress and their willingness to seek help from school social-emotional counselors in Guangzhou, China?

This study will close the literature gap that was mentioned above by investigating the correlation between academic stress and the counseling willingness of the Chinese high school student population. It also aims to inform Chinese educators about the need for mental health support in high schools, evaluate the effectiveness of existing support systems, and provide suggestions for improving counseling services to better meet the needs of Chinese high school students.

Research Hypotheses

In order to achieve the research objective, the following hypothesis was tested: There is a significant correlation between Type C Chinese International students' academic stress and their willingness to seek school counseling.

Methodology

Research Design

This study investigates whether a correlation exists between Type C International School students' academic stress level and their willingness to seek help from a school social-emotional counselor. The researcher evaluated demographic variables of the participants' age, gender, and grade level. This study employed a predominantly quantitative mixed-methods survey design. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected within the survey through rating scales and open-ended questions. The first variable was students' academic stress levels. The second variable was the willingness to seek school counseling services. The Pearson correlation method will be utilized to analyze the correlation coefficient. In addition, the researcher calculated the p-value to examine the statistical significance, with an alpha level of 0.05. A mixed-method approach was applied to both identify correlations and suggest potential factors that might influence these correlations to meet the research goal.

Participants

For the purpose of this study, Chinese high school students were recruited through student bulletin announcements, physical posters around the classrooms, and digital posters in student WeChat groups within a Type C international school in Guangzhou, China.

Chinese students who were recruited for this study must meet the following criteria: 1) Chinese students who were currently enrolled in a full-time Type C international school in Guangzhou, China. 2) Chinese students who can read and understand the survey questions. 3) Chinese students who have access to the online survey.

Measure

Multiple measurements were applied in this study. The two self-reported instruments were adopted and adapted into an online survey. The instruments were: The Student Stress Inventory (SSI) and The Willingness to Seek Counseling Scale (WSC).

Academic Stress

The Student Stress Inventory (SSI) is an instrument that can measure students' stress of different academic stress factors, which is one of the variables in this study. The SSI is a 40-item instrument that includes a 10-item Academic Stress subscale. This subscale specifically measures aspects of stress directly related to the academic environment, such as the pressure of submission deadlines, highly relevant to the participants' school setting. This instrument has been validated through factor analysis by Mohamed Arip in 2016. High-reliability indices of the Academic Stress subscale reflected by the factor analysis ensure the collected data is accurate. By applying this subscale, the primary researcher can quantify participants' academic stress levels for future analysis. For scoring, each answer was assigned a corresponding number on a 4-point scale: 'Never' corresponding to 1, 'Somewhat Frequent' to 2, 'Frequent' to 3, and 'Always' to 4. The average scores of the scale will be utilized in further data analysis.

Willingness to Seek Counseling for Academic Problems

The Willingness to Seek Counseling Scale (WSC) is the second instrument that was applied in this study since it helps the primary researcher quantify students' willingness to seek counseling - the second variable within this research. The WSC offers a 6-item Academic/Career Issues subscale designed to assess students' willingness to approach counseling for school-related concerns, which provides a rapid assessment of students' willingness to seek help from counseling services with questions related to several academic stressors, such as "test anxiety" (Gim et al., 1990, as cited by Li et al., 2012). For scoring, each answer was also assigned a corresponding number on a 4-point scale from 'Not Willing to Seek Help from Counselor' corresponding to 1, 'Probably Not Willing to Seek Help from Counselor' to 2, 'Probably Willing to Seek Help from Counselor' to 3, and 'Willing to Seek Help from Counselor' to 4. The average scores of the scale will be used for further data analysis.

Open-Ended Question

The survey includes two open-ended questions: the first, "What do you think is the main source of your academic pressure?" is placed at the end of the Student Stress Inventory Section. The second, "Why do you think you chose to go to or not seek help from a school social-emotional counselor?" is located at the end of the Willingness to Seek Counseling Section. These questions are designed to follow up on the participants' earlier responses in each respective section. The qualitative research data of this correlational study will be collected through these open-ended questions. The method of content analysis, as described by Leedy and Ormrod (2020), will be utilized to analyze participants' responses. Initially, the researcher will review all responses to the open-ended question to understand their overall content and context. Next, key phrases will be identified, and the data will be broken down into smaller categories, with each category labeled using open coding. This will be followed by refining and adjusting these codes, and merging similar ones as needed. Finally, the frequency of responses in each category will be counted. The open-ended responses will assist the primary researcher in identifying several potential factors that may affect the correlation.

Procedures

Before the participants started the survey, the participants were asked to read the Participant Consent Form. If the participants were under the age of 18, their parents were required to provide consent by signing the Parental Consent Form. Both the Participant Consent Form and the Parental Consent Form provided information on: the purpose of the study, the goal of the research, the voluntary basis, the length of time to complete the study, the number and types of questions within the survey, confidentiality, the right to withdraw, and the right to ask questions and report concerns.

The participants who were above the age of 18 will receive the link to the survey when they expressed interest in this study. The participants who were under the age of 18 received the survey link after the primary researcher received their Parental Consent Form with their parents/guardians' signature. After accessing the survey by a provided link and reviewing the Participant Consent Form, participants were required to express their agreement to join the study by clicking an 'agree' button. Those who clicked 'disagree' were excluded from the study. After providing consent, participants first completed basic demographic questions. They then proceeded to fill out the Student Stress Inventory (SSI) and the Willingness to Seek Counseling Scale (WSC). At the end of each section of the survey, two open-ended questions were included to gather more detailed responses. Participants can choose to complete the Chinese version survey which is translated by the primary researcher. The survey data was securely stored online using Microsoft Form, equipped with a firewall. Access to the data was restricted to the principal investigator, requiring a password and school user ID. All responses were kept anonymous, with no names or identifying details linked to the submissions.

Data Privacy

Individual participants in the study will not receive personalized feedback on their academic stress levels or counseling-seeking tendencies. However, upon completion of data analysis, an overview of the experiment's collective findings will be shared. These summarized results will be available in the published paper, offering all participants a broader understanding of the research's overall conclusions. The collected questionnaire data will be kept for five years before being disposed of. Prior to beginning participant recruitment and data collection, the researcher submitted a request for approval to the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Result

The purpose of the research was to investigate the correlation between Type C international school students' academic stress and their willingness to seek help from school social-emotional counselors in Guangzhou, China. This study hypothesizes that there is a correlation between Type C international school Chinese students' academic stress and their willingness to seek school counseling in Guangzhou, China.

Participants

All the participants are high school students from a Type C International School in Guangzhou, China. Initially, 68 students (59% female) were recruited for this correlational study, but 8 of them did not fully complete the survey. The data was collected over one and a half months.

Outliers

Outliers were identified after excluding the eight participants who did not fully complete the survey. The criterion for identifying outliers was based on the standard deviation. Participants were considered outliers if their responses for one of the scales had deviated more than three standard deviations from the mean (Sullivan et al., 2021). The presence of such conflicting data in outliers could significantly influence the correlational coefficient, leading to inaccurate research results. Consequently, four outliers were identified, leaving data from 56 students for further analysis.

Lastly, following the 10% rule for random sampling, a sample size of 56 participants is selected to represent the 560 Chinese student population.

Descriptive Statistics

Demographics

The first section of the questionnaire collected demographic data, including participants' age, grade level, and gender. Table 1 displays the frequency distributions for the age variable including the numbers (N) and percentages (%) of participants. Over 39% of participants were aged 18 or above, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Age Distribution

Age Range	N	%
14-15	9	16%
16-17	25	45%
18 or 18+	22	39%
Total	56	100%

Table 2 displays the frequency distributions for the age variable, including the numbers (N) and percentages (%) of participants with 45% of the participants in Grade 12.

Table 2. Grade Distribution

Grade Level	N	%
Grade 9	10	18%
Grade 10	3	5%
Grade 11	18	32%
Grade 12	25	45%
Total	56	100%

Quantitative Data Analysis

Since the scales' options have been quantified (see the Methodology section for details), the primary researcher can directly follow the questionnaire responses to calculate the total score for each participant.

Table 3 presents the mean ($M = 2.37$) and standard deviation ($SD = 0.51$) for academic stress scores, with higher means indicating higher levels of academic stress among Chinese students. Regarding willingness to seek school counseling services ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 0.7$), a higher mean suggests a greater willingness to seek help from school social-emotional counselors, while a high standard deviation means that students' willingness varies widely from the average score.

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation of Willingness to Seek Help from School Social-Emotional Counselor and Academic Stress Level

Variable	M	SD
Academic Stress	2.37	0.51
Willingness to Seek School Counseling	2.27	0.7

Note: There were a total of 56 high school student participants in this study. M = Means; SD = Standard Deviation

Figure 1 displays a scatterplot illustrating the relationship between participants' academic stress levels and their willingness to seek help from school counseling services, with a trend line added for visual reference. The correlation coefficient (r) was calculated using a two-tailed Pearson correlation test which is also displayed in Table 4, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$ and a critical value of 0.2221 for a degree of freedom of 54 ($n-2$). The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.2798$) exceeds the critical value (0.2221), indicating a positive correlation. The p -value of 0.037 is statistically significant, as it is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and it supports the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between participants' academic stress and their willingness to seek help from school counseling services.

Table 4. Correlation Matrix of Academic Stress and Willingness to Seek School Counseling

	Academic Stress	Willingness to Seek School Counseling
Academic Stress	1	
Willingness to Seek School Counseling	0.28*	1

* $p < .05$

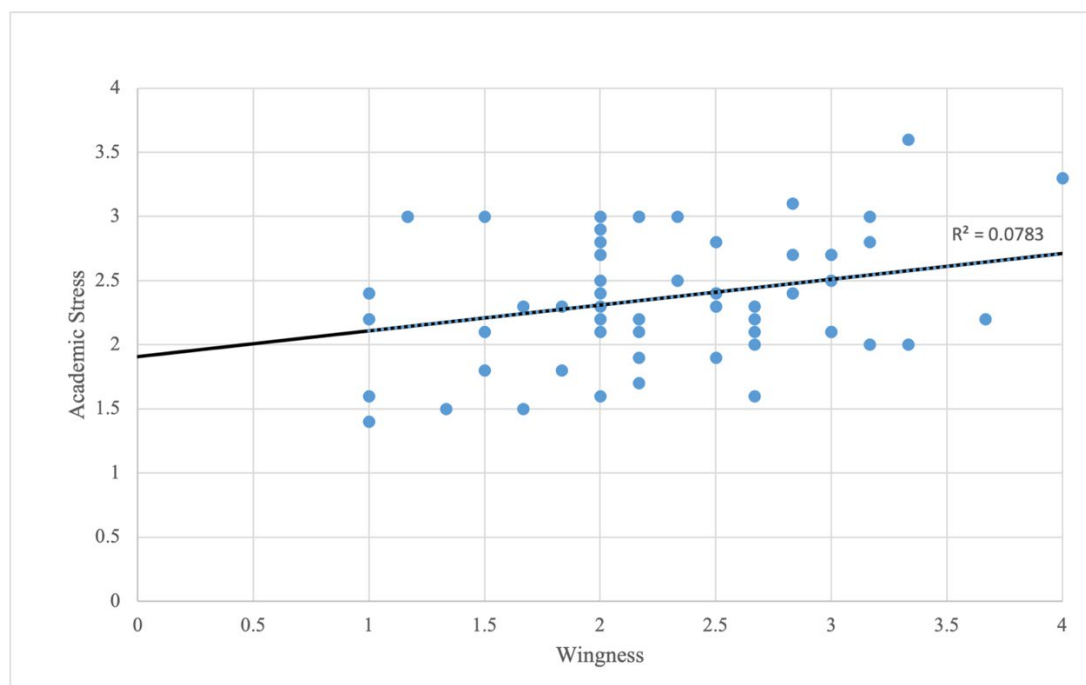


Figure 1. Scatterplot of Academic Stress and Counseling Willingness in Type C International School Chinese Students.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Table 5. Coding Responses on Academic Stress Sources and Counseling Willingness for Type C International School Chinese Students

Theme	Full Name	Definition	Frequency	Direct Quote
Academic Stress				
Academic Challenge	Workload Concerns	Concerns related to the amount and intensity of work required in academic settings	8	There are too many [Deadline goes together]
Academic Challenge	Course Difficulty and Understanding	Issues related to the complexity of course material and the level of understanding required.	9	The [difficulty of the learning materials] and [Teachers' ability to teach].
Academic Challenge	Time Management	Strategies and challenges related to organizing and prioritizing time effectively for academic and personal tasks.	4	It's to work on subjects that I am not very confident in, to [divide time] to review and work outside of class while having to work on multiple different subjects

				and extracurricular activities.
Academic Challenge	Performance Pressure	The stress and anxiety associated with the need to perform well academically.	24	The contradiction between [my parents' high expectations, my own high expectations, and my overall capacity]
Social and Emotional Well-being	Social and Emotional Aspects of Academic Life	Factors related to interpersonal relationships, emotional well-being, and the social dynamics within academic environments.	8	Classroom presentations and group activities are [too awkward]
Willingness to Seek Counseling Help				
Barriers to Seeking Counseling	Perceived Ineffectiveness	Concerns about the efficacy of counseling.	15	I am [concerned about] the effectiveness of seeing a counselor
Barriers to Seeking Counseling	Self-reliance	A preference for dealing with problems independently, without seeking external help.	11	I can [handle it by myself]
Barriers to Seeking Counseling	Lack of Relationship	Absence of a strong, trusting relationship with the counselor.	6	We [don't have a close/trusting relationship].
Barriers to Seeking Counseling	Lack of Need	Perception that counseling is not necessary or relevant to their situation.	4	I [don't need] counseling help
Positive Attitude Toward Counseling	Specific Counseling Needs	Unique or specialized needs that are not being met by general counseling services.	5	I chose it because I know I have obstacles to work through and because I [need professional help] where I need it.

Table 5 provides a detailed overview of the academic stress sources and factors affecting counseling willingness among Type C International School Chinese students. The analysis revealed five key themes: three related to academic stress and two associated with the willingness to seek counseling. This breakdown offers insights into the specific academic challenges and perceptions that influenced students' decisions regarding counseling services. Notably, 45% indicated performance pressure as the primary stressor, with another 9% struggling to understand course materials. Regarding counseling, 86% reported factors reducing their willingness to seek help, including 39% who doubted the effectiveness of the school's social-emotional counseling services. Conversely, 14% were open to counseling, viewing it as a valuable resource for tackling challenges independently. This clear description helps understand students' perceptions and the effectiveness of counseling services.

Discussion

As there is limited research in the present field on the correlation between academic stress and counseling willingness among Chinese high school students, this study aims to explore this relationship at a Type C International School to address this research gap.

Result

The overall analysis indicates a statistically significant weak positive correlation between Chinese students' academic stress and their willingness to seek help from school social-emotional counselors.

Explanation for Findings

Previous research indicates a positive relationship between academic stress and counseling willingness among Asian international students, with counseling seen as a last resort for serious mental health issues (Li et al., 2012). This study extends the focus to Chinese international school students, exploring the correlation between academic stress and the likelihood of seeking help from school social-emotional counselors. However, barriers such as perceived ineffectiveness, self-reliance, lack of trust, and perceived lack of need persist, limiting students' willingness to seek counseling. These findings are consistent with Li et al.'s prior research, suggesting a general distrust and reluctance to utilize school counseling services. As a result, this reluctance might lead students to handle negative emotions independently, particularly under increased academic pressure, as evidenced by 27% of participants preferring to deal with their stress and problems independently. However, this tendency towards self-reliance could result in burnout and exacerbate mental health issues, according to Mullen & Crowe (2017). Despite a growing openness to seek counseling, fear hinders action, potentially escalating academic stress without professional intervention. This cycle could explain the observed increase in academic stress with a higher willingness to seek help, yet with minimal actual engagement with counseling services. Moreover, this was the most significant finding from the study as it highlights the effect of willingness to seek counseling on students' academic stress.

In contrast, there is still a subset of students who view counseling positively, attributing their resilience to the professional support received. For example, one of the responders claimed that: "School social-emotional counselors usually have more experience in emotional management than I do, so they can help me to better understand my emotions so that my psychological problems can be treated, and I will feel more comfortable after talking with them." It is also reflected by a mean willingness to seek counseling above the scale average. Nonetheless, persistent obstacles, such as perceptions of ineffectiveness and stigma, continue to restrict broader utilization and acceptance of these services among the majority. (Dahir, 2004; Gao et al., 2010). In the qualitative data from this experiment, 15 out of 41 valid entries on Willingness to Seek Counseling mentioned that students questioned the effectiveness of school social-emotional counselors, confirming that this phenomenon still exists.

Secondly, academic stress has been identified as a primary factor leading to mental health-related issues among Chinese adolescents, with Zhou et al. (2023) highlighting three main sources: academic pressure, peer relationships, and family expectations. This aligns with this study's findings, where analysis of open-ended responses revealed similar themes: workload concerns, performance pressure, and the social-emotional challenges of academic life. Specifically, participants reported significant stress from the high demands of academic work, particularly during examination periods. Common stressors included excessive deadlines and homework, contributing to a heightened sense of pressure. This situation intensifies when students' performance does not satisfy their expectations (Lipson & Eisenberg, 2017).

In addition to personal expectations, parental expectations also play a crucial role in students' academic stress levels. Many participants indicated that high parental expectations, including but not limited to obtaining perfect

scores and admission to top colleges, can lead to increasing stress and potential burnout. In the qualitative data from this experiment, 24 out of 53 valid entries on Academic Stress mentioned that students are stressed that they may not be able to meet the high expectations set by both their parents and themselves. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that Chinese parents place significant pressure on their children for academic success (Kim & Omizo, 2003; Zhou et al., 2023).

Moreover, group work was also indicated as a main source of academic stress, as students felt more pressured when collaborating with unfamiliar peers. The research results highlight that students are particularly stressed when they invest additional time and effort in teamwork, and sometimes compensate for others' lack of contribution without a satisfactory result. Notably, this pressure varies significantly between students in public schools and those in Chinese International Schools, since the international school's curriculum emphasizes collaboration, contrasting with the Gaokao-focused individualistic approach of public schools. The intense competition for Gaokao strengthens a competitive environment that will constrain interpersonal relationships, limit the formation of genuine friendships, and reduce collaboration opportunities (Kim & Omizo, 2003; Wu & Zhang, 2023). With insufficient collaboration chances, this factor may affect Chinese students who study in Chinese public schools differently than this result indicates. This variation underscores the impact of different educational systems on peer stress, highlighting a critical area for further exploration.

Lastly, several participants implied that they prefer to share with trusted friends for emotional support under significant stress. This behavior aligns with Mendolia & Kleck's (1993) findings, which suggest that discussing stressors can motivate emotional processing or habituation. Such discussions may initially intensify emotions but eventually mitigate the stressor's impact, and improve coping strategies for future challenges. This principle may explain why students under significant stress are more willing to seek school counseling and highlight the need for Chinese counselors to build trusting relationships with students. As compared to other stressors, academic stress is generally perceived with less stigma and is less often classified as a mental health issue (Li et al., 2012). This perception increases students' willingness to seek counseling, as the students may feel more comfortable discussing academic concerns without fearing judgment (*ibid.*). Therefore, the combination of emotional support by discussing stressors and the reduced stigma associated with academic problems may help explain why Type C International School's Chinese students show a greater willingness to seek counseling services under intensified academic pressure.

In conclusion, this study highlights a complex correlation between students' academic stress and their willingness to seek counseling. Students are open to discussing academic issues with school social-emotional counselors due to the lower stigma related to academic problems. However, despite this tendency, a notable gap exists between willingness and actual use of counseling services. A minority view counselors as reliable, yet the majority hesitate to seek help when stressed, indicating barriers to accessing support. This situation may worsen the impact of stress on mental health. The observed dynamics are supported by a significant weak positive correlation, confirmed by a Pearson two-tailed correlation coefficient greater than zero, demonstrating the intricate link between academic stress and counseling engagement.

Conclusion

This study investigated the correlation between academic stress and counseling willingness in Chinese students at a Type C international school in Guangzhou, China. The hypothesis was tested and the null hypothesis was rejected, as the research result indicated that there is a weak positive correlation, suggesting that while students are open to seeking help under high stress, they often turn to non-counseling sources due to barriers in accessing school counseling services. The analysis also indicates that unresolved academic stress could exacerbate overall stress, contributing to the observed correlation.

Limitations

When evaluating the findings, the following limitations should be considered. Firstly, self-reported data cannot be independently verified. Both the Student Stress Inventory and the Willingness to Seek Counseling Scale are based on self-reporting, which can lead to potential biases: 1) Telescoping: Participants might not accurately recall the extent of their academic stress in line with the specific context outlined in the survey questions. 2) Exaggeration: There is a risk that students may represent their academic stress as more severe than what they truly experience. 3) Misinterpretation: Although the survey has been translated into Chinese and the primary researcher has ensured that the translation conveys the original meaning to help students in lower grades fully understand the question, linguistic nuances might lead to incomplete comprehension. To reduce the impact of limitations on research outcomes, the following strategies are recommended: first, enhancing question clarity by incorporating subheadings and specific scenarios relevant to each question, which can assist participants in recalling pertinent experiences and utilize Context-Dependent Memory for easier recall of information. Additionally, conducting pilot testing with a small group of students to identify potential confusion or misinterpretation in the survey, using their feedback to refine the questions for improved clarity and ensuring consistency between the Chinese translation scale and the original scale. Furthermore, provide participants with the primary researcher's contact information to address any questions.

Another limitation of this study is that the participants were limited to voluntary participants from a Type C International School in Guangzhou, China. Students from other educational settings, such as Type A International Schools for Non-Chinese nationality students only and Traditional Public Schools that mainly serve native Chinese students, were not included. Consequently, this research finding may not be generalizable to students in different regions or those following different curricula in China. Future research should expand the research sample to include students from other schools in different provinces in China, such as Type A and Type B International Schools, as well as Chinese Traditional Public Schools, which can enhance the diversity of the study. Students from different educational backgrounds may have varying experiences and perceptions of academic stress and counseling willingness, making the results more applicable to a larger population. Implementing these modifications in future research could yield more comprehensive insights into the topic and improve the reliability of the findings.

Implications

The findings suggest several implications for Chinese high school counseling offices to enhance their service utilization among local students. Firstly, in light of the willingness of students to seek help for academic stress, school counseling departments should prioritize advertising their focus on assisting students in overcoming academic stress and clearly promote the specific roles they can play in supporting students. By doing so, students will recognize school social-emotional counselors as a viable option for addressing psychological stress and will be more likely to seek counseling when needed.

Secondly, the findings indicate that students are more willing to share with the person whom they have established a strong trust relationship. Therefore, the school counseling department should organize various activities to strengthen their rapport with students. This will help counselors build a positive image in students' minds, encouraging them to lower their guard and communicate more openly about their academic pressures.

Finally, to foster trust in school social-emotional counselors, the school administration should ensure the confidentiality of counseling sessions, except in cases involving safety concerns that require external intervention. Additionally, the training of counselors should be enhanced to equip them with effective counseling techniques tailored to the diverse needs of students. These measures will collectively contribute to a more supportive and trustworthy counseling environment for Chinese high school students, and effectively address the distrustful relationships found in finding previously between students and school social-emotional counselors.

This study significantly enriches the literature by offering insights for school counseling professionals working with Chinese students, particularly those in high school. It enhances their understanding of the factors influencing Chinese students' academic stress and their willingness to seek counseling. Consequently, this knowledge can guide the creation of safe and positive clinical interventions, strategies, and systems aimed at supporting the mental health growth of Chinese students.

Direction for Future Research

Since correlation does not imply causation, future research should investigate various factors that may influence the willingness of Chinese students to seek school counseling, including 1) the role of cultural and personal stigma in their willingness to seek help, 2) the effectiveness of different counseling methods or models on students' willingness to seek counseling, 3) a comparison of the willingness to seek school counseling between students from Chinese Traditional Public schools and International schools, and 4) addressing the gap between the support offered by school counseling offices and the needs of students to better service for high school students' mental health. Investigating these factors can provide a deeper insight into why Chinese high school students may or may not seek school counseling services and their perceptions of the counseling services provided by Chinese schools.

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