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The Practice Path and Optimization Strategies of Leadership Policies in Higher Education for Students' Mental Health

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Abstract: Against the dual backdrop of the popularization of higher education and the acceleration of social transformation, student mental health issues have become a key issue affecting the quality of talent cultivation. As the core lever for coordinating resource allocation and coordinating multiple forces, the practical effectiveness of higher education leadership policies in the field of mental health is directly related to the achievement of educational goals. This article is based on policy frameworks such as the "Special Action Plan for Strengthening and Improving the Mental Health of Students in the New Era (2023-2025)", and combines practical cases from institutions such as Nanyang Normal University and Qingdao Engineering Vocational College to systematically analyze the current practice status of leadership policies in organizational structure building, resource supply, and collaborative mechanism construction. Research has found that there are currently problems such as policy implementation hierarchy gaps, imbalanced resource allocation, and poor coordination mechanisms. By reviewing typical experiences in the construction of the "four level network", collaboration between school doctors, and intelligent monitoring, optimization strategies such as strengthening top-level design, optimizing resource coordination, improving collaborative systems, and perfecting evaluation mechanisms are proposed to provide practical references for improving the quality of mental health work in higher education.

Keywords: Higher Education Leadership, Student Mental Health, Policy Practice, Collaborative Education, Quality Assessment.

1. Introduction

The Outline of the Plan for Building a Strong Education Country (2024-2035) explicitly requires the popularization of mental health education and the establishment of a national student mental health monitoring and early warning system, elevating mental health work to the level of national education strategy. Under the continuous impact of uncertainty in the post pandemic era, college students are facing multiple pressures such as academic competition, career planning, and interpersonal relationships. The incidence of psychological problems is on the rise, and some surveys show that many students have experienced moderate or above psychological distress. The psychological problems related to research pressure are more prominent among graduate students. As a core tool for integrating educational resources and coordinating the main body of education, the effectiveness of higher education leadership policies in the field of mental health directly determines the coverage and professionalism of the service system. China has formed an institutional framework from the "Guidelines for Mental Health Education for Higher Education Students" to a special action plan. However, in the process of policy implementation, there is still a phenomenon of "warmth at the top, warmth at the middle, and coolness at the bottom": the lack of leadership in some universities has led to insufficient resource investment, and the teacher-student ratio of some full-time psychological teachers in universities has not reached the national standard of 1:4000. Due to limited funding, the functions of psychological counseling rooms in local universities are single and difficult to meet the needs of students [1]. The construction of a four level network of "school college class dormitory" by Nanyang Normal University and the creation of a distinctive psychological work system by Qingdao Engineering Vocational College have shown that strong and effective leadership policies can significantly improve the effectiveness of mental health services. This article is based on real policy texts and college cases, analyzing the practical path of leadership policies, exploring optimization strategies, and providing support for building a psychological education pattern for all staff, the whole process, and the whole domain.

2. The Core and Evolution of Leadership Policies for Mental Health in Higher Education

The leadership policy for mental health in higher education refers to a series of strategies and action frameworks for university managers to coordinate internal and external forces to implement the goals of mental health education through top-level design, resource coordination, institutional innovation, and other means. Its core essence is reflected in the three-dimensional logic of "value guidance resource integration collaborative empowerment". The value driven dimension emphasizes the integration of mental health into the "Five Education" system, such as the Ministry of Education's first National Student Mental Health Promotion and Education Month in 2024 proposing to "integrate mental health education into the entire process of moral education, ideological and political education, and teaching"; The dimension of resource integration focuses on optimizing the allocation of factors such as faculty, funding, and venues. Pingdingshan Vocational and Technical College has fully equipped full-time teachers according to national standards and established special funds; The dimension of collaborative

empowerment focuses on the linkage between schools, families, communities, and medical institutions. The practice of Wenshan College and local hospitals jointly building a crisis intervention green channel is quite representative [2].

The leadership policy for mental health in higher education in China has gone through three stages of development: in 2011, the "Basic Construction Standards for Student Mental Health Education in Ordinary Higher Education Institutions" established a three-level work network of "school college class", laying the organizational foundation; In 2018, the "Guidelines for Mental Health Education for Higher Education Students" proposed a "five in one" service system to strengthen systematicity; The special action plan jointly issued by the 17 departments in 2023 specifies key mechanisms such as "medical education collaboration" and "family school co education", marking the policy entering a refined stage. This evolution process highlights the shift of leadership policies from single management to diversified governance, but its implementation still faces challenges: some universities simplify policy implementation into formal operations of "setting up consultation centers and conducting surveys", failing to reflect the overall value of leadership.

The practical value of leadership policies has been fully demonstrated in demonstration universities. Nanyang Normal University has included mental health in the school's "14th Five Year Plan" development plan and annual assessment. Through the unified leadership of the Party committee and the collaboration of multiple departments, the policy has been implemented and successfully awarded the first batch of standardized construction demonstration schools for mental health education in Henan Province. This indicates that only by translating policy requirements into concrete organizational actions and resource guarantees can the core effectiveness of leadership be realized.

3. Practice Path of Leadership Policy for Mental Health in Higher Education

At present, Chinese universities have formed distinctive mental health leadership practice models, with the core path of organizational structure construction, resource supply guarantee, and crisis intervention implementation, all of which are fundamentally guided by policy documents.

In terms of organizational structure, "hierarchical network construction" has become mainstream. Qingdao Engineering Vocational College has built a four level network of "school secondary college class dormitory", extending services to dormitories through the "1+2+N" model led by the Party branch secretary, coordinated by counselors, and participated by student backbones. Chengde Medical College upgrades its "five level linkage early warning mechanism", integrates multiple departments to establish emergency response teams, and achieves 24-hour response. Nanyang Normal University has ensured the effectiveness of its network through technical guidance, financial support, and assessment, and has assisted over 260 students with severe psychological problems in three years.

In terms of resource supply, policies focus on teaching staff and funding. Many universities in various regions have implemented the "1:4000" standard for full-time teachers. Nanyang Normal University has a full-time teacher-student ratio of 1:3569 and a part-time ratio of 1:492, both exceeding the national standard. It has also established an "internal training and external training" system to ensure that full-time teachers receive at least 42 hours of training annually. Pingdingshan Vocational and Technical College will invest over 220000 yuan in special funds in 2024 to purchase sand table therapy and emotional release equipment; Some universities provide a guarantee fund of no less than 20 yuan per student per year and invest over one million yuan to build professional psychological centers. However, there are significant regional differences, with some local colleges having only 1-2 full-time staff to support the entire school's work.

In crisis intervention, "closed-loop management" is the focus. Most universities establish a "census warning intervention referral" process according to policies, while Qingdao Engineering Vocational College dynamically manages it with a standard process of "psychological general test result interpretation interview follow-up"; Chengde Medical College integrates 12 types of data through a smart platform and generates a "red orange yellow" warning map using AI, resulting in a 40% increase in crisis recognition efficiency [3]. Wenshan College has established a green channel with local hospitals to refer critically ill students, and Chengde Medical College has also set up care systems such as "accompanying patient scheduling" and "academic assistance" to solve the support gap after referral.

4. Leadership Policy Practice: Challenges and Deep Causes

4.1. Realistic Difficulties in Leadership Policy Practice

Despite the well-established policy framework and the practice of exemplary universities, there are still multiple obstacles to the implementation of higher education leadership policies in the field of mental health nationwide. The policy implementation has experienced a "hierarchical decline", with a gap between top-level design and grassroots implementation. The state requires "full participation", but some university leaders classify mental health as the sole responsibility of the student affairs department, resulting in insufficient coordination between academic affairs and logistics. Some psychological problems caused by academic pressure have been delayed in intervention due to poor coordination. The "Matthew effect" of resource allocation exacerbates the imbalance. Developed regions' universities can invest large amounts of funds to build 1000 square meter psychological centers and equip them with professional equipment. Local colleges and universities have limited funds, insufficient consultation room space, and single functions, making it difficult to meet basic needs. In addition, many local colleges and universities have a large shortage of full-time teachers, and part-time teachers are mostly administrative personnel who lack professional training. The fragmented collaborative mechanism restricts its effectiveness, and most universities in home school collaboration only contact parents in times of crisis. The lack of daily communication makes it difficult to activate the family support system, and some parents refuse to cooperate due to a sense of shame; The collaboration between school doctors often remains at the level of "referral", and although Wenshan College has a cooperation agreement, the depth of collaboration still needs to be strengthened; The collaboration between schools and communities is weaker, and many universities have not established contact with community

psychological institutions, resulting in a low utilization rate of social resources. The formalization of evaluation and supervision has led to the virtualization of policy implementation. Most universities simplify evaluation into "activity frequency" and "consultation quantity statistics", ignoring core indicators such as student satisfaction and intervention effectiveness. Some universities conduct multiple psychological activities annually, but the rate of students actively seeking help is still low [4].

4.2. Analysis of the Underlying Reasons Behind the Dilemma

The root cause of the above dilemma lies directly in the lack or misalignment of leadership. The decline in hierarchy and departmental barriers stem from insufficient leadership coordination. The experience of Nanyang Normal University shows that only with the unified leadership of the Party committee and the inclusion of mental health in multi departmental assessments can we break down barriers and form a joint force. The essence of uneven resource allocation is the difference in resource coordination ability between local education authorities and university leadership, which fails to translate policy requirements into a balanced supply mechanism, resulting in the lack of demonstration of leadership fairness value. The fragmented collaborative mechanism, due to the lack of systematic thinking in leadership, has not established an integrated pattern of "family school medical society", resulting in loose linkage and limited effectiveness among various entities. The formalization of evaluation and supervision is due to the lack of a sound leadership feedback adjustment mechanism and scientific evaluation, resulting in delayed policy adjustments. Chengde Medical College has achieved dynamic optimization through quantitative indicators such as "student satisfaction ≥ 90%" and "crisis recurrence rate ≤ 5%", which confirms the importance of strengthening the leadership feedback adjustment function.

5. The Practical Upgrade Path for Optimizing Leadership Policies

In response to the above difficulties, it is necessary to take leadership policy optimization as the core, construct a practical upgrade path from the four dimensions of organization, resources, collaboration, and technology, and transform policy requirements into actionable governance actions.

Strengthen organizational leadership and build a governance structure that is vertically interconnected and horizontally linked. Vertically improve the five level responsibility system of "university party committee functional department secondary college class dormitory", draw on the experience of Nanyang Normal University, incorporate mental health into the assessment at both school and college levels, and establish a "weekly report, monthly assessment" system. Establish a cross departmental mental health committee horizontally, with school leaders taking the lead in integrating the responsibilities of departments such as student affairs and academic affairs, and developing a "Departmental Collaborative Work Manual" to break down "departmental barriers"; The "1+2+N" model of Qingdao Engineering Vocational College can be promoted.

Enhance resource coordination and establish a "standard guarantee, diversified supply" allocation mechanism. The teaching staff strictly implements a 1:4000 full-time teacher-student ratio, and follows the practice of Pingdingshan Vocational and Technical College to include part-time teacher training in the teacher development plan, with no less than 30 hours of professional training conducted annually [5]. Establish a diversified mechanism of "per capita funding+special projects+donations" for funding, and set up special projects with a minimum of 20 yuan per student per year and publicly disclose their usage. The venue is equipped with standardized psychological centers based on the size of the students, including sand table rooms, venting rooms, and VR relaxation devices.

Deepen collaborative leadership and build an integrated network of "home school medical society". Establish a "parent classroom+online platform" at home and school, hold a parent teacher meeting at the beginning of enrollment, promote psychological resources every semester, conduct one-on-one interviews with high-risk students, and draw on communication strategies from Chengde Medical College. The school doctor promotes the "Wenshan College Model", signs a deep cooperation agreement, and carries out monthly health knowledge entry into the campus and quarterly joint supervision. Establish a "Psychological Service Resource Map" for the school community, integrate community and public welfare organization resources, and carry out volunteer activities.

Activate technological leadership and build a digital system of "smart monitoring and precise services". Based on the experience of Chengde Medical College, a smart platform is built to integrate multiple sources of data, and AI is used to achieve "red, orange, and yellow" three color warning. Developing online modules with features such as "Emotion Tree Hole" and "Anonymous Consultation", some universities have increased the volume of anonymous consultations through similar platforms. Establish a "lifelong strategy" archive and develop personalized plans for graduate students and other groups, such as setting up research stress management workshops.

6. The Guarantee Mechanism for Optimizing Leadership Policies

To ensure the implementation of the practical path, it is necessary to establish a guarantee mechanism from the three levels of system, talent, and culture, providing support for optimizing leadership policies to maximize effectiveness.

Improve the institutional guarantee system and strengthen the rigid constraints on policy implementation. Universities have formulated 30 supporting systems, including the Implementation Plan for Mental Health Education and the Emergency Response Plan for Crisis Intervention. Following the practice of Nanyang Normal University, a closed-loop system covering courses, consultation, intervention, and evaluation has been formed. The local education authorities have issued the "Detailed Rules for the Evaluation of Mental Health Work in Colleges and Universities", which includes faculty, funding, and collaborative mechanisms in the assessment, and implements "deadline rectification" and "special supervision" for universities that do not meet the standards. The country is accelerating the legislation of the Regulations on the Protection of Students' Mental Health, clarifying the responsibilities of all parties and providing legal support.

Establish a sound talent guarantee mechanism and enhance

professional support for leadership implementation. Build a three-dimensional team of "full-time+part-time+peer+external experts", equip full-time teachers according to the standard of 1:3000, encourage counselors to take the psychological counselor certificate, select and train sufficient psychological counselors, and establish a "peer growth camp". Improve the system of "pre job training - specialized training - supervision and improvement", cooperate with the mental health center to hold "clinical practice classes", and organize crisis intervention drills no less than 2 times a year. Establish an incentive mechanism, incorporate psychological work into teacher professional title evaluation, merit evaluation, and establish special allowances to stabilize the team.

Cultivate a culture of psychological education and strengthen the social foundation for policy implementation. Through the "5-25 Mental Health Month" and "10-25 Psychological Promotion Week", the concept of "mental health is a part of health" is conveyed through psychological dramas and mandala paintings [6]. Using the campus official account and short video platform to open the "psychological science column", Nanyang Normal University "Nanshixinyuan" has an annual average of more than 130 tweets, reading more than 100000 times, effectively improving awareness. Create a "warm consultation space" and set up a "psychological cabin" in the dormitory area to create an atmosphere of "accepting oneself and caring for others" and reduce the "shame" of seeking help.

Establish a dynamic evaluation mechanism to achieve continuous iteration of policy optimization. Build a "process+outcome" dual dimensional evaluation system, with process indicators including teacher training duration, funding availability rate, etc., and outcome indicators including student satisfaction, crisis identification accuracy, etc. Entrust a third party to conduct an annual evaluation, following the standards of Chengde Medical College, and set equivalent goals of "student satisfaction ≥ 90%" and "crisis recurrence rate ≤ 5%". Establish an evaluation feedback mechanism, hold "policy optimization symposiums" every semester, adjust resource allocation and improve service processes based on the results, and form a closed-loop management.

7. Conclusion

The practical effectiveness of leadership policies in higher education in the field of student mental health is directly related to the implementation quality of the "Healthy China" strategy and the construction of an educational powerhouse. Through policy text analysis and typical case studies such as Nanyang Normal University and Qingdao Engineering Vocational College, this article finds that China has formed a policy framework from top-level design to grassroots practice, but still faces challenges such as implementation level gaps, imbalanced resource allocation, and fragmented collaborative mechanisms. The core crux lies in the insufficient coordination, integration, and feedback functions of leadership.

Optimizing practical paths requires leadership upgrading as the core: building a governance structure of "five levels of responsibility+cross departmental collaboration" at the organizational level, and breaking down departmental barriers; Establish a "standard guarantee+diversified supply" allocation mechanism at the resource level to narrow the development gap; Building an integrated network of "family school medical society" at the collaborative level, activating multiple forces; Build a smart monitoring platform at the technical level to enhance service accuracy. The establishment of the four guarantee mechanisms of system, talent, culture, and evaluation can provide solid support for policy implementation.

The four level network construction of Nanyang Normal University, the home school doctor collaboration model of Chengde Medical College, and the "3-4" matrix of Qingdao Engineering Vocational College have shown that strong and effective leadership policies can transform institutional requirements into tangible service effectiveness. In the future, it is necessary to further strengthen the core leadership role of university party committees, incorporate mental health work into the entire process of talent cultivation, and build a psychological care pattern of full staff education, full process education, and comprehensive education through policy optimization and practical innovation, in order to safeguard the healthy growth of college students.

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