

Exploring Pathways for Life Education in Higher Education Institutions: Based on the "Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality" (CAMS) Framework

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Abstract: Life education in higher education institutions is crucial for promoting students' mental health and preventing extreme psychological crises. However, its practice often emphasizes concept promotion and knowledge dissemination, lacking efficacy in systematically identifying and preventing the core psychological mechanisms of suicide. This study aims to explore the theoretical pathway of integrating the core principles of the mature suicide intervention framework—the "Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality" (CAMS)—into the life education system of higher education. The article analyzes the dynamic and concealed nature of suicide risk among university students and the limitations of current life education. It explains the implications of key CAMS elements—such as focusing on "suicidality" as a collaborative target, structured assessment, safety planning, and instilling hope—for life education. Subsequently, a "Four-Dimensional Integration Model for CAMS-Informed University Life Education" is proposed, systematically arguing for specific pathways in restructuring goal systems, deepening content modules, integrating process cycles, and synergizing stakeholder networks. This provides a theoretical framework for enhancing the precision and preventive efficacy of life education, achieving a shift towards "upstream intervention."

Keywords: Life Education; Suicide Prevention; Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality (CAMS); University Students.

1. Introduction

The mental health of university students is vital for national talent strategy and individual holistic development. Although the suicide rate among Chinese university students shows a declining trend [1], the detection rate of suicidal ideation remains high [2], and suicide is one of the leading causes of non-accidental death. Suicide is a dynamic outcome of complex interactions among multiple factors [3], with its risk characterized by high concealment and fluctuation [4], posing severe challenges to university prevention systems.

University life education, which guides students to recognize, cherish, and pursue the value of life, holds a critical position. However, current practices face issues such as generalized goals, knowledge-oriented content, unidirectional processes, and insufficient stakeholder collaboration. More importantly, a "practice gap" exists between these practices and the core psychological mechanisms leading to suicide (e.g., unbearable psychological pain, perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belongingness) [5], limiting preventive efficacy.

The "Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality" (CAMS) framework from clinical psychology, developed and empirically validated over years, has become an effective, structured, and collaborative intervention method [6]. Its core involves setting "suicidality" as a "focal problem" requiring collaborative management, identifying driving factors through joint assessment, and collaboratively developing a personalized Stabilization Plan.

Although CAMS is primarily used clinically, its collaborative philosophy, structured understanding, and

respect for individual agency provide a "theoretical blueprint" for preventive life education targeting all students. The central proposition is: How can the essence of CAMS undergo "pedagogical transformation" and be systematically integrated into universal life education in higher education? Focusing on theoretical argumentation, this study aims to use CAMS as a reference to explore pathways for its systematic reconstruction of university life education, constructing a new model that can both educate universally and precisely empower students to manage suicide risk.

2. Current Situation Examination: The Complex Landscape of University Student Suicide Risk and the Practical Bottlenecks of Life Education

2.1. The Multifaceted, Dynamic, and Concealed Characteristics of University Student Suicide Risk

University student suicide risk is a systematic process involving interactions among multiple factors, encompassing proximal risks (e.g., suicidal ideation, perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belongingness) [5], distal risks (e.g., mental disorders, early trauma, inappropriate parenting styles) [7], and protective factors (e.g., psychological resilience, social support) [8]. Crucially, the risk is significantly dynamic, with high-intensity suicidal intent states lasting on average only 1 to 3 hours [4]. Furthermore, the risk is concealed. Students often hesitate to disclose their

distress due to stigma or help-seeking concerns, and implicit suicidal ideation can predict suicide attempts [9]. These characteristics demand that the life education system possess acute awareness and dynamic responsiveness.

2.2. Limitations of Current University Life Education and the Need for Integration

Facing the complex reality of risk described above, current university life education shows evident deficiencies in systematic response: 1. Generalized goals: Goal statements like "establishing a correct view of life" [10] lack direct connection to operational skills such as "tolerating psychological pain." 2. Knowledge-oriented content: Content often introduces life philosophy and positive qualities [11], lacking specific skill training like self-assessment during crises or activating safety plans. 3. Unidirectional and static processes: Predominantly teacher-led lectures lack collaborative exploration and insufficient linkage with dynamic psychological monitoring (e.g., psychological screening) [12]. 4. Isolated and singular stakeholders: Education is often seen as the task of psychological centers or ideological-political teachers, failing to effectively integrate forces like counselors, faculty, peers, and families [13], while social support is a key protective factor [14]. Therefore, life education urgently needs an upgraded framework that connects macro educational goals with micro psychological crises. The CAMS framework provides an indispensable "theoretical scaffold" for this purpose.

3. Theoretical Foundation: Core Principles of the CAMS Framework and Their Implications for Life Education

CAMS is not merely a set of clinical techniques but a philosophy and practical paradigm for understanding, respecting, and collaboratively managing suicide risk [6]. Its theoretical implications for university life education are embedded in the following core principles:

3.1. The "Suicidality-Focused" Problem-Oriented Principle

CAMS shifts the focus from "disease diagnosis" to "problem behavior." This implies that life education should scientifically and candidly incorporate "suicide" as a serious topic, guiding students to discuss its nature rationally, thereby destigmatizing it and clearing obstacles for early identification and help-seeking [15].

3.2. The "Collaboration and Empowerment" Relational Principle

The core of CAMS is an equal "collaborative alliance," granting agency to the client. This aligns with the "student-centered" concept, requiring educators to transition from instructors to collaborators and enablers, enhancing students' awareness and capability as the "primary agent" of their own mental health.

3.3. Structured Assessment of "Suicide Drivers"

CAMS uses assessment to outline an individual's unique map of driving factors (e.g., psychological pain, stress, perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belongingness). This

provides specific content targets for life education, allowing for the design of teaching modules around identifying and tolerating pain, challenging distorted cognitions, and building belonging connections.

3.4. Personalized "Safety/Stabilization Plan" (CSP)

The core output of CAMS is the *Stabilization Plan* co-created with the client. This contributes a universal skill module to life education: teaching every student to develop and utilize their own "life safety plan," equipping them with a personalized "psychological first-aid kit."

3.5. Motivational Interviewing and Instilling Hope

CAMS emphasizes exploring and strengthening the individual's "reasons for living," instilling hope. This suggests that life education must, through practical activities and narrative exploration, help students actively discover and consolidate their personal reasons for survival and positive expectations.

4. Pathway Construction: The Four-Dimensional Integration Model for CAMS-Informed University Life Education

Based on the understanding of risk reality and the insights from CAMS theory, we propose the "Four-Dimensional Integration Model for CAMS-Informed University Life Education." This model emphasizes a student-centered approach, aiming to empower and upgrade life education through systematic transformation across four dimensions.

4.1. Dimension One: Restructuring the Goal System—From Generalized Appeals to Precise Empowerment

Drawing on CAMS's precise focus on suicide drivers, life education goals should achieve stratification and depth:

1) Universal Cognition and Awareness Goals: Enhance all students' scientific understanding and self-awareness of core suicide drivers (psychological pain, perceived burdensomeness, belongingness issues), enabling them to identify their own "signals of distress" and "risky thinking patterns."

2) Universal Skill and Resource Goals: Cultivate basic self-care, emotion regulation, and crisis coping skills in all students. The core is ensuring every student masters the ability to create, update, and use a simplified personalized safety plan and knows how to activate their personal support network.

3) Targeted Empowerment and Development Goals: For potential high-risk groups identified through means like psychological screening [12], provide deeper group counseling to guide structured exploration of personal stressors and drivers, strengthen coping strategies, and enhance help-seeking motivation and sense of hope.

4.2. Dimension Two: Deepening Content Modules—From Knowledge Transmission to Experiential Coping

Transform CAMS's structured elements into experiential, practical educational content modules:

1) Module A: "Identifying and Abiding with My Pain": Based on the focus on "psychological pain," design experiential activities like mindfulness meditation, emotion journaling, and distress tolerance techniques to help students transform abstract pain into an observable, co-existent object.

2) Module B: "Challenging and Reconstructing My Value and Connections": Addressing "perceived burdensomeness" and "thwarted belongingness," use activities from narrative therapy, value sorting, and group bonding to guide students in challenging "I am a burden" thinking and exploring/strengthening their sense of value contribution and emotional connection [16].

3) Module C: "Mapping My Life Safety Plan": The core skill module. Directly teach students to develop their personal Safety Plan, including: early warning signs, internal coping toolbox, reachable social supports, professional resources, and environmental safety tips. The plan should be dynamically updated and shared appropriately.

4) Module D: "Discovering and Consolidating My Reasons for Living": Through activities like "a letter to my future self," life timeline drawing, and strength exploration, help students excavate, clarify, and reinforce their personal reasons for living and meaning in life.

4.3. Dimension Three: Integrating Process Cycles—From Unidirectional Teaching to Dynamic Collaboration

Integrate CAMS's dynamic collaborative and assessment process into the entire lifecycle of educational implementation:

1) Dynamic Linkage Between Screening Assessment and Educational Intervention: Use routine psychological screening as a basis for assessing group needs in life education, enabling precise allocation of educational resources.

2) "Collaborative Dialogue" in Educational Contexts: Employ exploratory, empathetic communication methods (e.g., motivational interviewing) in courses and group counseling to guide students in sharing thoughts on stress, loneliness, etc., and jointly explore solutions.

3) Establishing "Individual Psychology-Life Growth Files": Create simplified growth files for students (especially those of focus), recording significant life events, emotional patterns, coping strategies, etc., as tools for self-reflection and teacher-student review.

4.4. Dimension Four: Synergizing Stakeholder Networks—From Singular Instruction to an Educating Community

Construct a multi-level collaborative support network analogous to the CAMS therapeutic alliance:

1) Core Collaborative Layer (Direct Synergy): Students are the primary agents of self-management; trained counselors and psychological consultants form the core professional collaborators, using a common language to work with students, creating a supportive triangle.

2) Extended Support Layer (Indirect Synergy and Atmosphere Cultivation): Integrate resilience education into subject teachers' roles; train psychological committee members to become "gatekeepers"; guide families in enhancing their attentiveness and communication skills.

3) System Safeguard Layer (Institution and Culture): University administration must provide policy and resource

support, build an integrated institutional system, and foster a campus culture that candidly discusses psychological distress and encourages help-seeking.

5. Conclusion and Outlook

Facing the concealed, multidimensional, and dynamic risk of psychological crisis among university students, life education in higher education needs to evolve towards a new paradigm of deep integration, systematic prevention, and precise empowerment. This study argues for the feasibility and pathways of transforming the CAMS framework into a "theoretical blueprint" guiding the upgrade of university life education.

By elaborating the "Four-Dimensional Integration Model for CAMS-Informed University Life Education," this paper demonstrates how CAMS's core principles—focusing on the problem, collaborative empowerment, structured understanding of pain, safety planning, and instilling hope—can be applied to reshape the goals, content, processes, and collaborative networks of life education. The essence of this pathway is the "pedagogical transformation" and "preventive dilution" of clinical risk management wisdom for high-risk individuals, turning it into a new "operating system" for life education that can empower all students and enhance intrinsic psychological immunity.

This paper focuses on theoretical model construction. Future work needs to develop curriculum resources and teacher training manuals based on this model; utilize technology to explore precise matching of psychological needs with educational resources; and conduct empirical research to test the model's effects on improving psychological resilience, reducing risk cognition, enhancing safety plan use, and improving help-seeking behaviors. Practice must carefully consider ethics, ensuring the scientific safety of educational interventions and clearly defining the responsibilities of universal education, developmental counseling, and professional intervention.

In summary, exploring pathways based on the CAMS framework builds a theoretical bridge connecting in-depth crisis intervention with broad educational prevention. It aims to more effectively safeguard the baseline of psychological safety and propel life education towards a more professional, humane, and hopeful direction, achieving deep integration of "nurturing the heart" and "educating the person."

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