

# REVITALIZING COLLEGE MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION: THE FUSION OF SPORTS ELEMENTS

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## Abstract

The mental well-being of college students is of utmost importance as they play a pivotal role in shaping the future of our nation. In recent times, there has been a surge in extreme events stemming from psychological challenges faced by college students. The conventional method of addressing these issues primarily involves mental health courses designed for college students. However, the prevalence of high-profile incidents highlights the pressing demand for an overhaul of college mental health curricula. This article delves into an innovative approach to foster the mental health development of college students, proposing the integration of sports elements into college mental health courses.

## 1. Introduction

College students are the builders and successors of our country's socialist cause, and their growth development are of paramount importance. Currently, there have been frequent extreme events among college students resulting from psychological issues. The main approach to college student mental education is through courses on college student mental health. The occurrence of these high-profile events reflects the urgent need for reform in college mental health curricula. This article explores a new model for promoting the mental health development of college students by incorporating elements of sports into college student mental health courses.

## 2. Current Status of College Mental Health Courses

In the era of internet development, college students have constant access to various information, the environment is rapidly changing. Meanwhile, college students are in a stage of psychological where they may struggle with effectively discerning and absorbing information, making them to external influences. These factors pose significant challenges to the mental health of college students. College students are valuable human resources for the nation, and their comprehensive development, both physically and mentally, is a major concern for society as a whole. In 2011, China issued the Requirements for Psychological Health Education Courses for College Students in Ordinary of Higher Education," which explicitly stated the need to establish mental health courses for college students within the educational system. This has led to the gradual establishment of mental health in various universities. Over the years, universities have been gradually improving the development of mental health courses. However, there are also some issues that need to be addressed. The status of mental health courses in universities is elective, meaning they carry fewer credits and may not receive sufficient attention from students. Additionally, instructors often rely on a didactic teaching approach, where students passively receive the course content, which hinders the full potential of these courses in promoting the mental health of college students. On the other hand, physical activities play a crucial in promoting interpersonal communication and emotional regulation among college students. They can effectively enhance both the mental and physical well-being of

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students while cultivating individuals with comprehensive development in morality, intelligence, and physical fitness. Therefore, curriculum reform in universities is necessary, particularly in enriching the teaching elements of mental health courses and incorporating physical activities.

### ***2.1 The educational methods are simplistic***

In the process of teaching the course "College Student Mental Health," university professors often focus on imparting theoretical knowledge related to mental health, aiming for students to grasp the theoretical foundations of mental well-being. However, this didactic approach employed during the teaching of basic theoretical knowledge results in dull and monotonous classroom experiences. Students remain passive recipients of information, lacking interaction. Such a teaching model struggles to capture the attention of college students. Coupled with their limited life experiences, they perceive the course as lacking practical value and fail to recognize its importance, leading to a lack of interest in the subject. Their motivation to study this course is primarily driven by the pursuit of credits, resulting in a deficiency of enthusiasm for learning.

### ***2.2 The teaching methodology is limited to a single form***

As students transition from high school to college, they encounter significant environmental changes, and everyone's adaptability varies. Moreover, teaching is primarily conducted through specialized topics, addressing the challenges encountered in each stage of university life. However, the stages faced by college students also differ. The course "College Student Mental Health" adopts a large-class teaching format with minimal classroom interaction, leading to a decrease in both the enthusiasm of teachers and students. It becomes challenging for instructors to meet the personalized needs of each student, ultimately hindering the effectiveness of teaching and impeding the promotion of college students' healthy development.

### ***2.3 The classroom teaching philosophy remains entrenched in traditional and conservative practices***

In the current teaching process of college-level mental health courses, there is a prevailing belief that these courses should be taught solely from the perspective of psychology, lacking innovation and flexibility. There is a conservative attitude that prevents the integration of elements from other disciplines, thereby impeding the development of college student mental health courses.

Overall, despite some degree of development, there are significant issues with current college student mental health courses. The teaching methods are simplistic, relying on a singular instructional approach, while the classroom teaching philosophy remains traditional and conservative. As a result, college students' mental health courses fail to achieve the desired outcomes, with students primarily staying at the level of affective cognition without delving deeper to address practical issues. In recent years, numerous studies have shown that physical exercise has a significant impact on both the physical and mental health of college students. Therefore, incorporating sports-related elements into college student mental health courses can not only promote physical fitness but also contribute to mental well-being. Consequently, integrating physical exercise into mental health education has become a key focus of reform in college-level mental health education.

## **3. Feasibility Analysis of Introducing Sports Elements into College Mental Health Education**

Sports elements refer to the static entities of material nature that are potentially incorporated in campus cultural construction, forming a sports atmosphere, sports culture, sports spirit, and dynamic sports humanities landscape constituted by various sports behaviors.

### ***3.1 The integration of traditional sports elements into college mental health education aligns with national policy requirements***

The "Healthy China 2030" Planning Outline, issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council, proposes the widespread promotion of nationwide health activities, the continued development and implementation of fitness plans, the popularization of scientific knowledge and methods related to fitness, and the promotion of a fitness-oriented lifestyle. With the publication of this outline, it signifies a new direction for physical education in universities, where the importance of sports for physical fitness and mental well-being will be increasingly emphasized. The "Basic Requirements for the Teaching of Psychological Health Education Courses for College Students" published by the Ministry of Education in 2011 emphasizes the need to design comprehensive courses that integrate knowledge, experiences, and training. It advocates for interactive teaching in order to avoid one-way knowledge impartation. The approach of combining theory with experiential learning and combining instruction with practical training is recommended.

The notice issued by the Ministry of Education and other seventeen departments regarding the implementation of the Special Action Plan for Comprehensive Strengthening and Improvement of Student Mental Health Work in the New Era (2023-2035) mentions the promotion of holistic development with an emphasis on mental health. Within this framework, the concept of "physical strength for mental well-being" is highlighted, recognizing the role of physical education in regulating emotions and relieving stress. It advocates for the implementation of school sports programs as a foundation-building initiative, aiming to enable students to derive pleasure from physical exercise, improve physical fitness, develop a sound character, and cultivate determination.

Not only does it align with national policies, but it also conforms to the World Health Organization's definition of health. In 1984, the World Health Organization stated, "Health is not just the absence of disease but a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being." Physical education encompasses these aspects concurrently. Therefore, the incorporation of traditional elements of physical education into mental health education in universities is in accordance with national policy requirements. Universities can selectively introduce traditional elements of physical education based on the specific requirements and educational objectives of physical education reform. This approach can help students develop an optimistic outlook on life and a sound character while enhancing their physical fitness through sports training programs.<sup>[1]</sup>

### ***3.2 Introducing traditional elements of physical education facilitates the development of a comprehensive model for mental health education in universities***

Universities can adopt new teaching methods during the process of delivering mental health courses, making the teaching approach more diverse and dynamic. All available methods can be applied to various aspects of mental health education in universities. Among the methods of emotion regulation, physical exercise stands out as the most convenient, effortless, and feasible way to regulate emotions. Its limitations are minimal, making it suitable for all groups, particularly college students who are energetic and at a prime stage for physical fitness development. A good physical condition serves as a prerequisite for all endeavors. In addition to limited-scale psychological practices, we can incorporate physical exercise into extracurricular psychological activities to further stimulate students' motivation and promote their psychological well-being.

### ***3.3 Universities possess comprehensive capabilities to conduct diverse teaching activities in the field of mental health education***

The integration of physical education elements into the teaching process poses higher demands on the teaching competence of university faculty. It requires instructors to possess not only knowledge in mental health but also expertise in physical education. Fortunately, universities serve as platforms that house professionals in both psychology and sports sciences, providing an environment conducive to interdisciplinary knowledge acquisition.

## **4. The role of incorporating physical education elements into college students' mental health courses**

### ***4.1 Emotion Regulation Among College Students***

Most college students today come from single-child families, where they have been the center of attention for their parents, grandparents, and relatives throughout their upbringing. Consequently, they may develop a self-centered mindset. Upon entering college, each student brings unique experiences and backgrounds, which can lead to conflicts and contradictions, resulting in negative emotions. Furthermore, college life introduces additional pressures in terms of academic demands, romantic relationships, and social interactions, leading to significant emotional fluctuations. Research has shown that physical exercise can enhance cerebral blood circulation and trigger the release of endorphins, which are neurochemical substances similar to opioids produced by the pituitary gland. These endorphins contribute to feelings of pleasure and can effectively improve mood.<sup>[2]</sup> Thus, engaging in sports and physical activities plays a crucial role in promoting emotional well-being among college students.

### ***4.2 Improving Interpersonal Relationships Among College Students***

The emergence of many psychological issues often stems from interpersonal relationships. To promote the mental and physical well-being of college students, it is necessary to enhance their skills in managing interpersonal relationships. Sports activities, being a collective endeavor, involve elements of both competition and cooperation. Through this process, college students learn healthy competition and cooperation, which allows for the formation of more positive relationships. Engaging in exercise helps individuals establish trust and improve their interpersonal abilities. Therefore, sports participants, regardless of their positions or cultural backgrounds, engage in exercise on an equal footing. They approach exercise with an open mind and a relaxed mood, without

any mental burdens or personal agendas. This exercise process promotes the exchange of thoughts and emotions among participants, leading to a sense of intimacy and the cultivation of emotional connections with others. <sup>[3]</sup>

#### **4.3 *Cultivating Positive Qualities***

In various sports activities, such as martial arts, long-distance running, and others, we need to exercise our willpower. These activities test an individual's endurance and challenge our inclination towards complacency. For college students, engaging in physical exercise can sharpen their willpower, which will have far-reaching effects on all aspects of their future lives. The development of positive qualities is crucial for individuals, as it is a necessary condition for their personal growth and success.

#### **4.4 *Alleviating Stress and Fatigue***

Physical exercise is, in fact, the optimal choice for alleviating stress, such as engaging in yoga practice. During the process of exercise, both your body and mind can experience effective relief, temporarily escaping the high-stress state of daily life. This allows for a sense of calmness to settle in, while the fatigue accumulated throughout the day can also be alleviated.

### **5. *Incorporating Elements of Sports in Interventions***

#### **5.1 *Incorporating Sports Elements and Psychological Knowledge into Games in and outside the Classroom***

We can incorporate a game of "Pictionary" in the classroom, where students can experience various emotions that we encounter in our daily lives. For instance, they may feel frustrated when they struggle to convey their intended meaning through gestures, or experience surprise when they quickly communicate their ideas. By engaging in this game, college students can understand that experiencing a range of emotions is a normal part of life. Furthermore, even negative emotions can be beneficial as long as they do not become excessive.

To further integrate physical exercise and psychological knowledge, university professors can create specific scenarios that allow students to reflect on their experiences during physical activities and gain a deeper understanding of theoretical concepts, which can then be applied to their lives. For example, an outdoor activity called "Back-to-Back" can be organized, where students are divided into two groups. The last person in each group faces the facilitator, who displays a number. The participants then pass the message backward and the goal is to see which group can transmit the information most accurately and efficiently. This activity mirrors the challenges that college students often face in interpersonal relationships such as handling relationships with classmates, roommates, romantic partners, or teachers. The quality of these relationships largely depends on the accuracy of information transmission. Through engaging in such games, college students can deeply appreciate the presence of communication errors in various aspects of life. By creating these innovative learning experiences, students can develop a better understanding of emotional responses, interpersonal dynamics, and effective communication skills. This holistic approach enhances their personal growth and equips them with valuable life skills beyond the confines of traditional classroom settings.

We can incorporate different game activities tailored to address the needs of various student groups. This diversified approach enriches our teaching methods and allows students to experience personal growth through enjoyable learning experiences.

#### **5.2 *Establishing sports and fitness programs within the mental health center***

In college mental health courses, it is important not to confine knowledge delivery solely to the classroom setting. Engaging in sports and fitness activities outside of class allows students to apply theoretical concepts and gain a deeper understanding through practical experiences. Sports and physical exercise serve as effective means for college students to alleviate stress. By establishing sports and fitness programs within the mental health center, such as having punching bags available, students can release their anger and stress through striking the bags. This approach effectively helps them manage their tendencies for self-aggression or aggression towards others, providing a scientifically-backed method for stress relief. Typically, college students engage in sports and physical activities as an outlet for the stress they experience during the learning process or interpersonal interactions. Psychological counseling and guidance work can assist students in expressing their inner thoughts, allowing mental health professionals to have a better understanding of the causes behind their suboptimal well-being. With this knowledge, scientific stress reduction techniques can be employed to open up students' hearts, help them overcome their burdens, and continue living with optimism. <sup>[4]</sup>



### 5.3 *Promoting the growth and development of college students through diversified physical exercises*

In the university physical education classroom, it is important for instructors not only to assist college students in engaging in regular physical exercises but also to scientifically address negative emotions. This requires organizing diverse activities based on practical considerations to achieve this goal. [5] We can divide students into different sports groups based on their preferences, allowing students from different majors to experience personal growth within like-minded communities. Additionally, we can arrange sports competitions for them to experience the allure of teamwork and develop their ability to collaborate with others in their future lives. For example, if a student has an introverted personality, they may choose to engage in solitary running. To cater to their individual habits, we can provide more opportunities for group sports activities, enabling them to experience joy through interactions in team sports and allowing them to better integrate into the collective.

By implementing these strategies, we can create a supportive and inclusive environment in which college students not only engage in physical exercises but also develop essential life skills such as teamwork, communication, and adaptability. This holistic approach to physical education contributes to their overall personal and academic development.

### 5.4 *Incorporating elements from other disciplines into teaching to transform traditional pedagogical approaches*

Traditional college courses on mental health primarily focus on teaching specialized knowledge in psychology without drawing upon beneficial elements from other disciplines. However, it is important to recognize that mental health is closely connected to physical well-being. When an individual experiences physical health problems, it can significantly impact their mental state. Physical education not only promotes physical health but also contributes to psychological well-being.

In recent educational reforms, there is an increasing emphasis on integrating different disciplines. Therefore, it is necessary to incorporate elements of physical education into college courses on mental health. To achieve this, mental health educators should also acquire knowledge in the field of physical education. This interdisciplinary approach will enable them to better integrate and deliver instruction from various disciplines. By integrating physical education elements into college courses on mental health, students can benefit from a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. They will learn how physical exercise and activities contribute to not only their physical well-being but also their mental and emotional states. Educators can explore topics such as the impact of exercise on stress reduction, the role of physical activity in promoting positive emotions, and the connection between physical fitness and cognitive function. Furthermore, incorporating physical education elements into mental health courses can provide students with practical strategies for maintaining their overall well-being. They can learn about the importance of regular exercise, proper nutrition, and adequate rest for managing stress and promoting mental resilience. To implement this interdisciplinary approach effectively, collaboration between mental health educators and physical education professionals is essential. By combining their expertise, they can develop a curriculum that seamlessly integrates the two disciplines, ensuring that students receive a holistic education that addresses both their mental and physical health needs. In conclusion, by incorporating elements of physical education into college courses on mental health, educators can provide students with a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. This interdisciplinary approach recognizes the interconnectedness of mental and physical well-being and equips students with valuable knowledge and strategies for maintaining their overall health.

## 6. **Conclusion**

In recent years, there have been frequent occurrences of extreme events on university campuses, indicating that the role of mental health in higher education has not been fully realized. Therefore, it is necessary to reform college courses on mental health education. The inclusion of physical education and health in these courses aligns with national policies and enhances the instructional elements and diversity in the classroom. Respecting the diverse needs of students can effectively motivate their engagement in the classroom and promote their healthy development. While some challenges may arise during the implementation process, it is certain that a mature teaching model will be developed through exploration. This model will facilitate the effective delivery of college mental health courses, ultimately providing support for the cultivation of well-rounded individuals who contribute to the nation.

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