

Foreword

Improving Child and Adolescent Mental Health Comprehensively in Challenging Times

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Mental health, an integral component of well-being, encompasses more than the mere absence of illness (1). Improving the mental health of the next generation is essential, as it not only affects their health in adolescence and adulthood but also enables them to thrive in various aspects of life, such as learning, working, forming relationships, and contributing to society (2–3). Currently, China faces growing concerns regarding mental health issues among children and adolescents (4). Recognizing the gravity of this situation, the government has implemented various policies, including the Special Action Plan for Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving the Mental Health Work of Students in the New Era (2023–2025) (5). However, regional disparities and the complex interplay of factors influencing youth mental development are posing challenges to the effective implementation of these policies, highlighting the need for more integrated and impactful interventions.

This special issue presents a series of articles examining the current status, influencing factors, latest policies, and interventions related to mental health issues among Chinese children and adolescents. These studies consider both positive psychology and psychopathology, providing a comprehensive perspective on mental well-being. Li et al. analyzed the mental well-being of Chinese adolescents aged 13 to 18 using nationwide data, identifying regional disparities and vulnerable populations and emphasizing the importance of targeted interventions to improve adolescent mental health (6). Zhou et al. employed socio-ecological systems and network structures to illustrate the relationships among multidimensional factors influencing adolescent depression, finding that parental awareness of emotional abuse was crucial for prevention (7). Yang et al. investigated the impact of gender and school grade on mental health symptoms and risky behaviors, highlighting the need for tailored interventions that address both gender- and grade-specific mental health challenges (8). Yuan et al. expound upon the background and significance of the Special Action Plan for Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving the Mental Health Work of Students in the New Era (2023–2025), including its main content, key points, highlights, and implementation. This analysis enhanced the international understanding of China's mental health work implementation strategies, particularly the potential of school hygiene work in the field (9). Jiang et al. explained the benefits of peer support among children and youth, providing an update on the progress and future applications of peer support for adolescent mental health in China (10). This special issue aims to provide a comprehensive review of the challenges faced by Chinese youth and offer potential solutions to improve their mental health.

Addressing these challenging times requires a multifaceted approach. While research has explored the prevalence and distribution of psychological issues like depression and anxiety among children and adolescents, a standardized method for comprehensively and conveniently measuring their overall mental health remains lacking. Furthermore, analytical methods that address the multidimensional impact of factors influencing child and adolescent mental health — across genetic, personal, peer, family, educational, environmental, and social levels — need development. Comprehensive interventions targeting these various determinants are also necessary. Ultimately, fostering positive mental health development for future generations requires a collaborative, society-wide effort.

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