

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Experiences of mental health factors among domestic and international health professions students: a qualitative study at universities in China

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Supplementary Table 1. Interviewees' main themes and sub-themes and associated quotes regarding mental health risk factors.

Theme	Category	Subtheme	Quotes
Competition and social status	Academic pressure and stress	Stresses and expectations of childhood education	"All through childhood, adults place importance on academic success as key to a good life, so academic failures in childhood feel catastrophic, like dooming your life" "In the eyes of our parents, we have to go to school to become a teacher or a doctor...like we say, an iron rice bowl, a profession that you can rely on to support you your whole life, so they'll feel that musicians or designers, these don't count as professions, these are just leisure"
		Competition with peers	"In high school, I was praised by teachers as a role model, someone other students should learn from. In college, I can't be as good as before, it's hard to even keep up with classmates, I feel like I went from first to last" "After midterms and finals, they put up our grades in public with our names and rankings for everyone to see"
		Increased pressures and workload for health professions majors	"Medical students have more classes, our tests are really close together...our entire semester feels like preparing for tests" "The costs of going to medical school and the length of time are too long, especially since after you get your bachelor's you still have to do training"
		Increasing requirements for post-graduate training and jobs	"No one wants someone with a Master's anymore, you basically need to have a PhD"
		Lack of guaranteed payoff in post-graduate job	"We need to look for a job in our field with a decent salary, but once we go to see those health centers, they're not very good options and have low salary, like it's not even as good as someone who hasn't graduated college" "Many people worry they can't find a job and feel like they've wasted these five years of studying"
		Stigmatization of certain careers	"Mentally ill all kill people, that type of thinking...with this ideological background, the status of psychiatry is decreased, and patients also are stigmatized"
	Work environment for health professionals	Breakdown in the doctor-patient relationship	"Some doctors will speak to you with impatience and not really explain your treatment plan, will make you do all these exams that are expensive, give you a lot of medications without explaining how to proceed, so [the patient doesn't] know how [the illness] will progress, to what degree, and then that breeds distrust" "China does have a lot of hospital fights that truly aren't the doctor's fault, they're because the patient wants money"
		Hospital violence	"You see so many patients everyday, each carries a certain amount of risk, you don't know which ones could be dangerous to you, and if something happens, you may not be able to manage it. So maybe you start off wanting to be compassionate and empathetic, but in reality even if you want to do it you can't" "If psychiatric patients hurt you, you can't even blame them because they have psychiatric illnesses, which is very scary"
		Frequent exposure to death	"I'd see so many patients and suffering that I'd feel almost numb, like no longer to that point in the past where I would feel so emotional for them. Sometimes I would even be shocked, like am I already becoming numb even though I'm not even a doctor yet?"
	Family	Pressures on only	"If you're an only child, all the hopes of a family are placed on you. If you had a younger sibling, you

	relationships	children	could be more relaxed”
		Criticism rather than support-based parenting	“If you use a bad method [of teaching children discipline], you’ll give kids a bad memory of their childhood...a lot of mental issues stem from childhood” “I wanted [my dad] to stably work and care more about the education and lives of his children instead of rarely asking about our grades and scolding if they were bad, or if they were good, not encouraging us...I felt like no one really cared about me”
		Expectations of obedience	“My parents didn’t ask me whether I wanted to study humanities or science, they just directly signed me up for science...Why do they always have to choose for me?” “We have to really care about what our parents think and what they say, because if we don’t obey them, they may get mad. Sometimes I resist a little, telling them they’re managing me too much, and my mom will say, ‘okay, I’ll just never care about you again, do what you want’”
		Desires to make family proud	“I feel like I haven’t made [my dad] proud, in my studies I haven’t achieved much, and if do a Master’s and publish papers, he’s not going to read those journals...I feel like I can never get his approval”
Challenges for diverse students	Socioeconomic and rural/urban disparities	Education disparities	“The things you learn in primary school in rural and urban areas are different. For example, in urban schools you would probably start learning English in first grade. In rural areas, you may not start learning English until middle school”
		Disparities in social support and connections	“Everyone is looking for a job and uses their connections in addition to their abilities. For someone from a rural background looking for a job who has no connections, they may encounter equally-qualified people with a lot of money who leverage their connections to get a job”
		Ethnic minority status	“Many ethnic minorities are from remote areas, and maybe their economic status, previous education, and skills aren’t comparable to those of other students”
	Sexual minorities	LGBTQ+ students lack support and acceptance	“I was forced to come out, suddenly many people knew, and I felt like I was the only gay person. Because I hadn’t spoken to others about this, I felt very lonely. Many people knew about me, but I didn’t know what people thought of me”
	Challenges for international students	Learning Chinese	“I was doing about 10 courses. They were all in Chinese and my Chinese wasn’t up to a good level. I’d go to class, not understand anything, the Powerpoint is in Chinese, lecturer is talking very fast in Chinese. I can’t even understand to write anything”
		Financial stressors	“If the student doesn’t pay the school fees, they will send you back home, won’t give you visa...They send people home almost every year”
		Living in a new country	“Most of us this is our first time having to leave our country, sometimes even our very immediate environment. Most of us have not even been to different parts of our countries where the culture is a little different” “They said we shouldn’t cook...but we still cook. Because it’s pretty strange that you tell somebody, you come here for four, five six years, and not to, you know, at least have a bite of my own food”
		Racism and discrimination	“We go to some places that act as if you are not really a human being. That kind of racism is still active here” “Those who are working or teaching, some of them are made to lie. Because they learn that if you are not American, from Canada, or Britain, you will not be able to get a job”
Transitioning to adulthood	Living independently	First time living away from family	“First year of college is the first time that many people are living far away from their family for a long time, they may feel really lonely”

		and hometown	
		Transition between intensity of <i>gaokao</i> year to unstructured system of college	“From high school to college, there is more relaxation, like being liberated from a place. You no longer have to face all sorts of stress, but you will face more boredom” “In high school, you’re used to someone giving you schedules and objectives for studying, but once you’re in college it’s hard to adjust, now you have to study on your own”
	Peer relationships	Conflicts between roommates	“The school automatically assigns you to a dorm and you’ll meet some different people, so now online everyone is saying oh, my roommate is so annoying and there are roommates killing each other” “[My roommates] are used to the three of them going together [to eat], so when they call each other to go, they’ll call the other two and not call me and this really bothers me and makes me sad”
		Pressure to be in romantic relationship	“Some girls may look around and see that if everyone else is in a relationship but them, they’ll be really distressed, and sometimes start to feel like maybe there’s something wrong with them, like they’re not pretty or attractive enough”
		Intensity of first romantic relationships	“In high school we’re not allowed to date, and then college is a lot more open...but the romantic scars you experience in college are especially deep” “If you’re inexperienced, you may not have ways to deal with breakups and will feel like you’re in chaos and despair”
		Marriage pressures	“If you’re a girl who reaches 27 or 28 and don’t have a boyfriend, aren’t getting ready to get married, your family and relatives will ask you, what’s wrong with you” “Now men are many, women are fewer, so we consider whether a man has a house and so on. This places a burden on the man’s family too. They feel like they have to first buy him a house or else he won’t find a wife”