

Can Non-Subject-Based Off-Campus Training Improve Student Mental Health in the Context of the Implementation of the Double Reduction Policy? A Study Based on a Survey in 30 Counties in Six Eastern, Central, and Western Provinces of China

Weidong Fu, Wei Li

Central China Normal University, Wuhan 430079, Hubei, China

Abstract: *Mental Health of primary and secondary school students has drawn wide public attention against the backdrop of the implementation of the Double Reduction policy. This article aims to analyze the effects of non-subject-based off-campus training on student mental health based on an investigation among primary and secondary school students from 30 counties (cities, districts) in six eastern, central, and western provinces of China.*

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Correspondence to: Weidong Fu, Central China Normal University, Wuhan 430079, Hunan, China. E-mail: 604143009@qq.com

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Introduction

According to the survey results of the Report on National Mental Health Development in China (2019-2020), only 14.24% of Chinese teenagers reached the standard of mental healthiness and 24.6% of them were identified as suffering from depression in 2020 (Fu, Zhang, & Chen, 2021). This shows a worrisome circumstance of mental health development in Chinese primary and secondary students. Hence, how to enhance their mental health level has become a severe challenge in Chinese basic education. In July 2021, Chinese government issued the Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training for Compulsory Education Students (often referred to as the Double Reduction policy). As a result of the implementation of the Double Reduction policy, the number of subject-based off-campus training institutions has been significantly reduced, with a 95.6% decrease in offline institutions and 87.1% reduction in online training platforms. This study focuses on the current state of non-subject-based after-school training in the context of the execution of the Double Reduction policy and the impact of the participation in non-subject-based off-campus training on mental health of primary and secondary school students.

Research Methods

Research Subjects

This study conducted a questionnaire investigation simultaneously in the eastern province of Guangdong, central provinces of Hubei and Hunan, and western provinces of Sichuan and Guizhou by means of stratified sampling and obtained 11340 questionnaires, among which 8436 were valid. As “participating in non-subject-based off-campus training or not” is a key factor in the analysis, questionnaires with this critical information missing were eliminated, and ultimately 5973 questionnaires were used in this study.

Research Tools

The Independent Variable: Participating in non-subject-based off-campus training or not.

The Dependent Variables

- **Depression**

Two items from the Depression Scale developed by the China Education Panel Survey (CEPS) were used to measure students' depression levels.

- **State Anxiety**

It is psychological and physiological transient reactions directly related to adverse situations in a specific moment. Consulted were the State Anxiety Scale from the State-and

Trait-Anxiety Scales revised by Zhang (1998) and the Self-rating Inventory of Test Anxiety revised by Wang (1995).

- **Positive Affect**

It refers to individuals' positive attitudes. The Positive and Negative Affect Scales developed by Watson et al. (1988) were consulted.

Covariates

Individual, family, and school-level covariates were included in the analysis. This study controlled for trait anxiety as a covariate of state anxiety since state anxiety may be affected by trait anxiety of the individual.

Data Analysis

The processes of data analysis included the following: (i) Descriptive statistics were used to present the dependent variables; (ii) Ordinary least square regression was adopted to analyze the relationships between the independent variable and dependent variables; (iii) Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) was used to match the treatment and the control groups, and the balance of the matching was checked; (iv) Iweight was utilized to regress the relationships between the independent variable and dependent variables; (v) Robustness check was conducted on the model.

Research Findings

- After the launch of the Double Reduction policy, the number of primary and secondary school students participating in non-subject-based off-campus training decreased slightly, while the time and money investment of the participants in the training basically remained stable.
- Participating in non-subject-based off-campus training could significantly relieve the depression of primary school students but had no significant effect on their state anxiety and positive affect. It had no remarkable impact on the depression, state anxiety, and positive affect of junior secondary school students.
- Non-subject-based off-campus training could effectively ease the depression and state anxiety of urban students and rural non-left-behind students but had no significant influence on mental health of rural students and left-behind students (children of migrant workers).

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