

Research on the Application of the Psychological Assistance Program for College Staff: A Case Study on the “Psychological Health Service Experience Day” Program for Faculty and Staff of Jinan University

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Abstract

This paper probes into the actual effects of the psychological assistance program for college faculty and staff by analyzing the survey results, steps and achievements related to the “Psychological Health Service Experience Day” program. The paper evaluates the pressure sources of college faculty and staff, identifies their psychological problems and then intervenes, hoping to help them maintain positive pressure, relieve the negative and excessive one, and finally puts forward suitable and useful measures for the construction of college psychological assistance program system.

Keywords

Higher Education Faculty and Staff, Psychological Assistance Program, Happiness

1. Introduction

According to the *Outline of the Healthy China 2030 Plan*, a programmatic document for the national health, educators should bear the education concept of “Health comes first” firmly in mind and integrate health education into every part of teaching. Teachers, spending most of their time educating their students, are influencing the students with their powers of personality. Therefore, their mental health condition not only determines the effects of teaching, but also has

a significant impact on students' physical and mental development (Boe, 2018). In this regard, the psychology education workers in Jinan University have found the key point in psychological education, discovered the interest points of the faculty and staff, and made efforts to build a mental health education system, aiming to improve the mental health level for all.

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) originated from the enterprises. It was initially used to deal with the employees' alcoholism and addiction, and gradually developed into a solution for the problems about stress management, time management, psychology, medical care counseling, financial counseling, legal aid, etc. (Jiang et al., 2012). By adopting EAP, enterprises can solve the problem of occupational stress of employees, so colleges and universities can also apply this program accordingly to relieve excessive pressure and provide specialized humanistic care for their staff. The results of literature retrieval show that the current research methods on psychological stress of college teachers are mainly questionnaire survey, supplemented by interview, and the survey tool used by most people is SCL-90, which mainly discusses the basic forms and consequences of psychological stress of teachers. Among the numerous studies, the joint study by Allen Daniels & Lisa Teems et al. is the most representative (Ma, 2011). A considerable number of scholars have found that the psychological stress of teachers has become universal (Terraschke & Wahid, 2011). In addition, cases have proved that the EAP can be successfully implemented in the university system at home and abroad. However, the development of EAP project in colleges and universities is basically blank, and most college staff have no understanding of this new concept (Yan & Liu, 2020).

2. Overview of the Mental Health Service Survey for Faculty and Staff of Jinan University

2.1. Basic Information of Respondents

Questionnaires were distributed to all of the trade union groups in the university to carry out the survey. With a recovery rate of 100%, 75 questionnaires were collected and all of them were valid. Among the respondents, 25 are male and 50 are female, and most of them are under 45 years old (with 33% under 35 and 42% falls in the age range of 35 to 45). As for the length of service, 34% of respondents have been worked for less than three years and 32% of them more than 10 years (see **Figure 1**).

2.2. Main Sources of the Life Pressure and Troubles for Faculty and Staff

2.2.1. Work Effort-Reward Ratio

According to the survey, faculty and staff are slightly less satisfied with the ratio of effort to reward at work. 38% of respondents are "satisfied" with the ratio, 29% "dissatisfied", 13% "very dissatisfied", and 20% "unsure". Notably, none of the faculty are "very satisfied" with the ratio, while a total proportion of 42% of them fall into the dissatisfied dimension (see **Figure 2**).

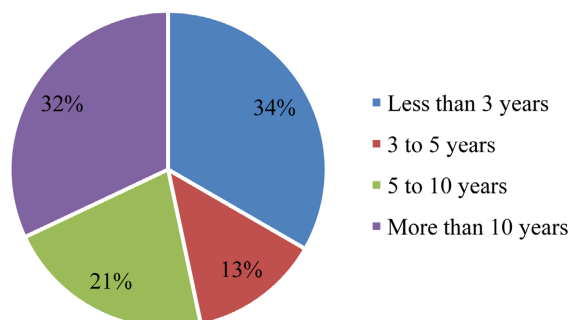


Figure 1. Length of service.

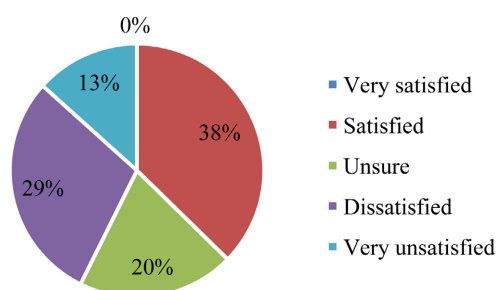


Figure 2. Degree of satisfaction of work effort-reward ratio.

2.2.2. Level of Job Pressure

Among the staff who participated in the survey, 68% of them have a high self-perceived stress level, but it is still in a manageable range of; while 15% of the participants find themselves stressful and difficult to handle the stress on their own. 16% have an average stress level, and only 1% thinks the work can be done easily (see **Figure 3**).

2.2.3. Source of Pressure

According to **Figure 4**, 88% of respondents believe that the main stresses in life come from work, as 33% regard the work itself as the source of pressure, 29% think that it is the excessive workload that makes the work stressful, and other 29% see their leaders and colleagues as the ones who give them pressure. 5% attribute stress to family factors, while 7% think that their stresses are brought by other factors besides work and family.

2.2.4. Major Troubles in Life

A whopping 40% of those polled think that the worries about their career are the major troubles in their life. 18% are troubled by family related problems (marriage, children and parents, etc.). 16% are stuck with their careers, and the last 10% struggle with interpersonal communication (see **Figure 5**).

2.2.5. Methods of Coping with the Disturbance

According to the results (see **Figure 6**), when the respondents encounter troubles in life, 65% of them tend to solve the problems by adjusting themselves, 15% turn to leaders and colleagues for help, 9% turn to family members, and only 8% turn to professionals.

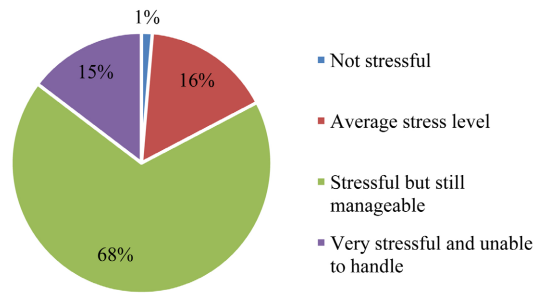


Figure 3. Level of job pressure.

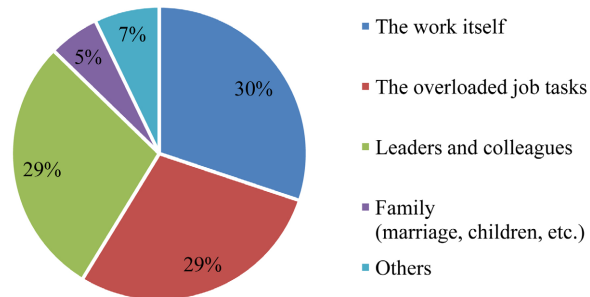


Figure 4. Source of pressure.

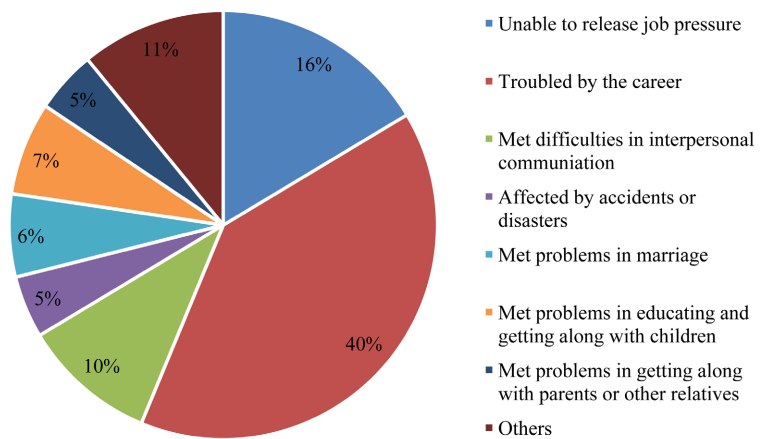


Figure 5. Major troubles in life.

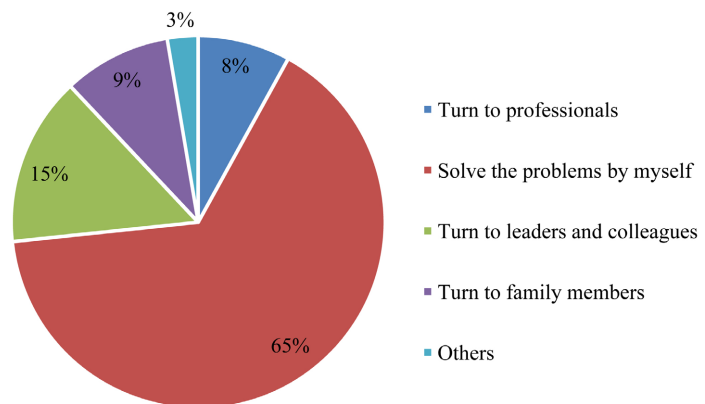


Figure 6. Methods of coping with the disturbance.

2.3. Staff's Understandings and Expectations of Mental Health Services

2.3.1. Inclination of EAP Service

When asked about the inclination of EAP service, 23% of respondents hope that EAP can provide services that “improve professional skills and personal comprehensive quality”, then the “consulting service for emotional and stress management”, accounting for 22%. 17% want career-planning advice, 11% ask for the consulting about “caring for the elderly or children”. Other types of advice, such as “legal disputes and financial knowledge” (8%), “family relationship and healthy lifestyle” (7%), “interpersonal relationship” (7%), and “company emergency management” (3%), are also requested (see **Figure 7**).

2.3.2. Accesses to the “Psychological Health Service Experience Day” Program

When asked how to get the information of the “Psychological Health Service Experience Day” program, 37% of respondents reply that they got relevant news through campus publicity, 21% through the Internet, 26% through leaders and colleagues, and only 1% have never heard any news about the program (see **Figure 8**).

2.3.3. Participation of the “Psychological Health Service Experience Day” Program

In the survey on the participation of the “Psychological Health Service Experience Day” program, 85% of respondents have never taken part in the activities, 15% just joined occasionally. None of them have participated regularly (see **Figure 9**).

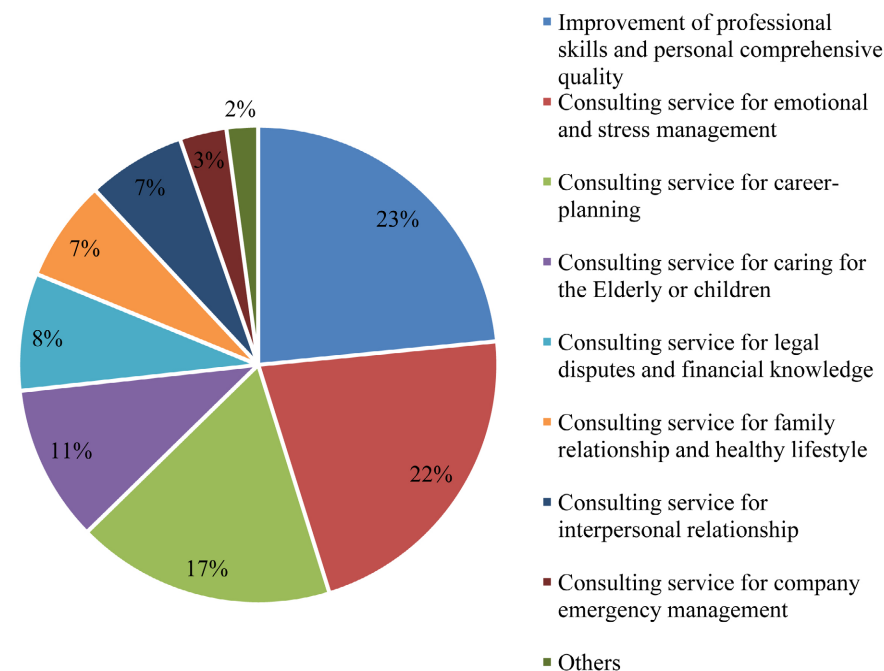


Figure 7. Inclination of EAP service.

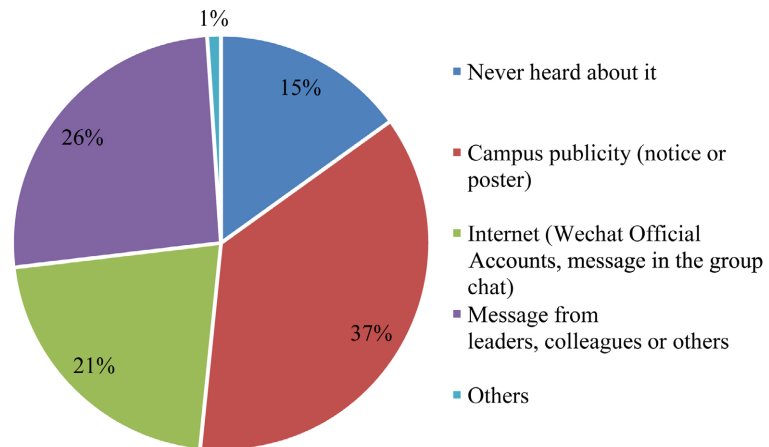


Figure 8. Accesses to the “psychological health service experience day” program.

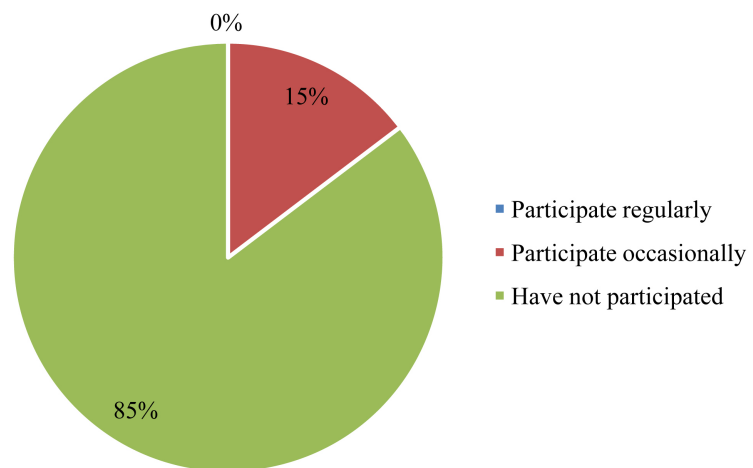


Figure 9. Participation of the “psychological health service experience day” program.

2.3.4. Topics of Interest

The results of the survey on the theme of activity show that 30% of respondents are interested in emotion management, accounting for the highest proportion. The topics about mental illness identification and parent-child relationship accounted for 21% and 20% respectively, while the last 11% are interested in romance and marriage (see **Figure 10**).

2.3.5. Forms of Activity on the Experience Day

There are mainly three forms of activity on the Experience Day, i.e., lectures, individual counseling and group counseling. Up to 60% of respondents hope to combine the three forms mentioned above. If they can only choose a single form to participate, they prefer individual consulting experience, followed by special lectures (see **Figure 11**).

2.3.6. Intention to Participate in the Activities of the Experience Day

According to the results of the survey on the intention to participate in the activities of the Experience Day, 97% of respondents express their willingness to join,

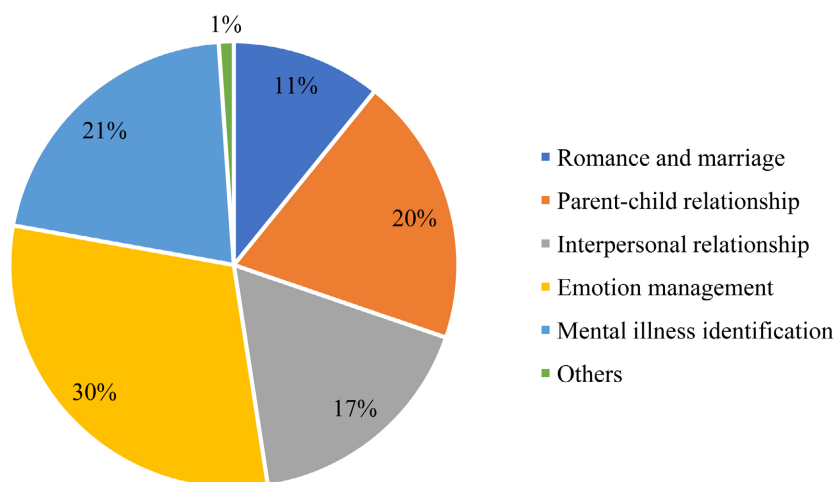


Figure 10. Topics of interest.

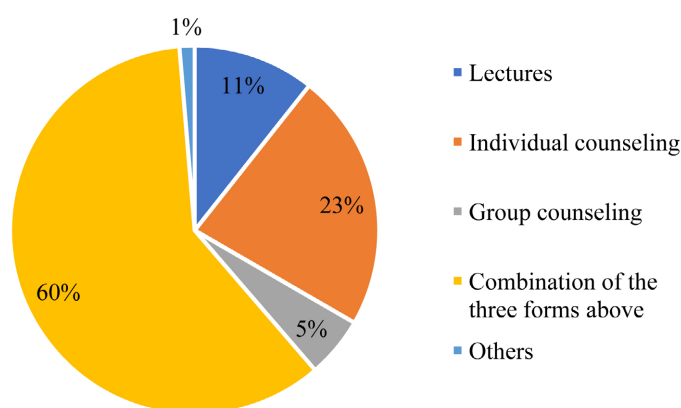


Figure 11. Forms of activity on the experience day.

and they do hope to get their problems solved in the activities. Only 3% of those surveyed specifically show their attitude that they would not participate in the Experience Day (see **Figure 12**).

2.3.7. Expected Time of the Activities of the Experience Day

In the survey about the expected time of the Experience Day, the majority of respondents (73%) hope that the Experience Day can be held from 2 to 6 p.m. on weekdays. 17% of respondents want the event to be carried out between 2 to 6 p.m. on weekends, while only 7% of respondents choose the time period of 6 to 10 p.m. on weekends (see **Figure 13**).

3. Implementation of Psychological Health Service Experiential Activities

The Psychological Assistance Program for Faculty and Staff of Jinan University has been in operation for twelve years since 2010, with almost 100 experiential sessions held in total. The activities include psychological assessment for teachers, psychological archives establishment; “Jinan Xinqing Forum”—JNU’s

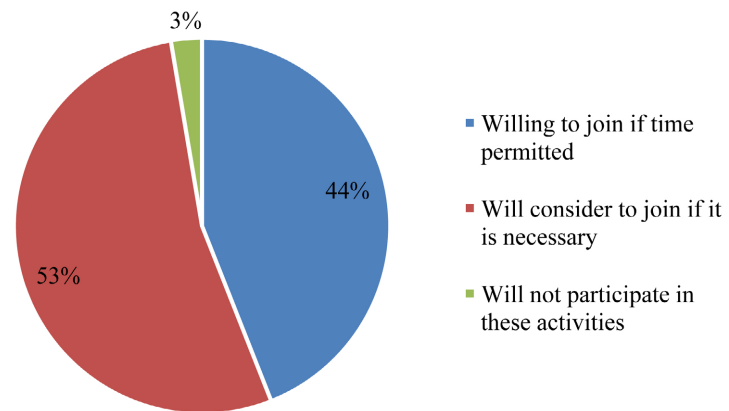


Figure 12. Intention to participate in the activities of the experience day.

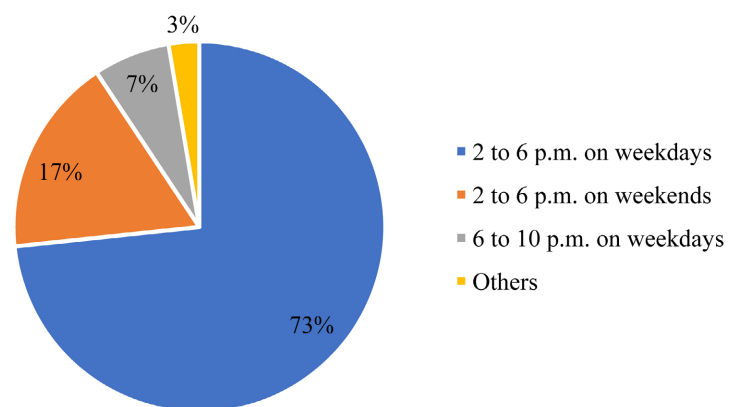


Figure 13. Expecting time of the activities of the experience day.

regular activities for mental health promotion; lectures on emotion management; “New Lotus Training Program”—a program for training qualified Party cadres of the high-level university building; group sand play therapy for young staff; reading activities, etc. Based on the results of the questionnaire survey, the program has made some adjustments compared with the original activities. For example, the following items have been added to the staff’s experiential activities:

- 1) Individual counseling: we hope to solve their psychological problems and reduce the negative impact on their work due to personal problems.
- 2) Public lectures: we invite experts to hold a series of parent-child education workshops to promote psychological knowledge, focusing on topics such as stress debugging and relationship interpretation.
- 3) Group counseling: we host fruitful activities including dynamic group psychotherapy, dance or movement therapy, and biofeedback-assisted relaxation training, etc.

The “Psychological Health Service Experience Day” Program is designed as follows:

- 1) Service objects: all faculty members or individuals of campus organizations of Jinan University.

2) Service objectives: according to the investigation of occupational stress, pressure management needs of teachers in colleges and universities, and JNU's own organizational characteristics, we hope to equip the teaching staff with stress management skills and methods, deliver psychology-related knowledge and self-care skills, and provide them with necessary assistance services such as emotional guidance, psychological counseling and group counseling.

3) Service content:

a) One-hour micro-lecture. We invite domestic and foreign psychologists to give lively case-based training courses, with less than 50 beneficiaries.

b) Developmental counseling experience. We invite three or more national level II counselors to provide short counseling experiential classes for twelve faculty members in each session, helping them identify existing problems in work and life, and improve the ability to treat stress independently. The Mental-health Education Center will provide follow-up counseling services if long-term treatment is needed after the activities.

c) Group counseling: two or three group counseling programs are conducted in each session, with less than 30 beneficiaries, such as dance relaxation therapy, hypnotherapy, small wooden man family therapy, drawing quiz and OH subconscious card activities, etc.

After each session, we suggest the new participants join the activity message group for future effect tracking and evaluation, based on which we can collect the valuable suggestions and opinions from the staff, and hold meetings for the program expansion and upgrading. It's of great significance to summarize staff's suggestions and report to related college leaders, which ensures that the psychological service experience day could gradually better satisfy the requirements of teachers in colleges and universities.

4. Discussion

4.1. Feasibility

4.1.1. Innovative Practice for Realistic Pressure Reduction

For a long time, people have paid more attention to physical health, while the psychological one has always been neglected. Recent years have witnessed a tendency that a number of supportive policies were put forward as the Party and the country have been strongly advocating enough attention and emphasizing on mental health issues, which exactly provides a suitable opportunity for building a nationwide environment of healthy psychology cultivation. The teachers in colleges and universities are actually prone to encounter group pressure. Given their fast-paced living and working style, these teachers should pay more attention to their life and mental health, and take the initiative to seek help from professionals and resources in case of psychological confusion. Therefore, it is necessary to hold some courses regularly and promotion activities on mental health for the teachers, through which they can correctly understand and cope with various types of pressure, and then solve their mental problems with a positive

and healthy attitude. All in all, it's pivotal to learn to relieve stress independently.

4.1.2. Feasible Methods and Approaches

According to the questionnaire results, we found that there were certain problems shared by the teachers, and the Mental Health Assistance Program can assist them in improving coping skills from multiple aspects such as emotions, stress, interpersonal relationships, and career planning (Yi, Zhao, & Hu, 2014). And the service steps are listed as below:

1) Activity promotion. We make full use of campus-based media channels including publicizing platforms and official webpages, as well as some social platforms such as WeChat, Weibo and other online broadcasting media to find potential participants.

2) Public lectures. We provide a communication platform for faculty members with no more than 40 members in each session; in this way the participants' psychological quality can be furthered and they would obtain a sense of belonging among peers, and expand their effective social support system.

3) Individual counseling. The counseling has been conducted by three or more individual counselors per session, with one faculty member involved per half hour, and the number of beneficiaries receiving individual counseling experience per session could reach twelve. By doing this, the involved groups change their former perception of counseling, and obtain targeted assistance. They can still play active roles in advocating others to accept professional counseling (Zhang, 2009).

4) Group counseling. We set two different experience programs in each session, from which the participants would release stress and gain insight in a relaxing community atmosphere. In each period, we can guarantee about 30 people to participate and benefit.

4.1.3. Adequate Manpower and Financial Support from the College

China has decades of history in training psychology professionals, which provides a large talent pool for related research activities. At the same time, the research directions in psychology are becoming increasingly diverse, which attracts more scholars to participate in this field. At present, the common models of EAP at home and abroad are divided into the internal model of management, the external model of contract, the joint model of resource sharing and the hybrid model (Wen, Wang, & Jia, 2013). The EAP Psychological Service Experience Day carried out by Jinan University was jointly organized by the Mental-health Education Center and the Trade Union, combining with support from several well-known professional psychological organizations in Guangdong (Liu, 2016). In other words, we arranged a dedicated person in charge of this assistance program within the organization, and we have also established some contractual relationships with some other professional organizations, coordinating both internal and external EAP resources to formulate and implement the pro-

gram for our staff.

The activities could not be carried out in an orderly manner without the support from the Jinan University and other relevant departments. In terms of the psychological assistance program, the college has provided us with the following support:

1) A set of supporting and well-established policies. In addition, the relevant departments granted special and sufficient human, financial and material resources in accordance with related regulations, these departments included the Personnel Office, the Trade Union of college, college-affiliated medical units, logistics departments, voluntary groups and off-campus counseling departments and organizations. These served as solid supporting and assisting resources for the EAP.

2) Necessary environment for the program. As program activities increased and faculty members became more motivated to participate, the higher requirements have been put forward in such respect as activity field scale, equipment updates, and information platform upgrades, which proved rigid issues ready to be addressed.

4.2. Major Problems

During the implementation of the experience day activities, through continual reflection, we found that there are the following aspects requiring further improvements:

1) Publicity should be strengthened for motivating faculty members to accept and participate in the psychological assistance program. Given the long-term influence of Chinese traditional culture, Chinese teachers in colleges generally lack necessary mental health awareness, and tend to equate psychological problems with mental illness; or even if they know that mental problems are not health issues, they would be too shameful to talk about these for fear of being made fun of. Teachers of Jinan University, though, presented a relatively positive attitude towards the activities, there were still a large number of teachers with a reserved posture, so we still need to make efforts to improve their enthusiasm for participation.

2) College leaders should provide enough attention and support. Former theories and practices of EAP at home and abroad did verify the importance of administrators' support, which works as the cornerstone for the smooth implementation and promotion of EAP (Crosthwaite, 2016).

3) Activities should be conducted in both targeted and comprehensive manners. Teachers of different ages, genders, education levels, titles, and disciplines have different stress sources and different emphases, and each teacher has his own specific problems. In the process of advancing activities, we should continue to analyze problems shared by the majority in combination with problems specific to certain individuals, while resorting to a comprehensive method.

4) The principles of confidentiality, voluntariness, and assistance with no identification should be strictly observed. During the activities, out of curiosity

about the psychological professional knowledge, or given the fact that members themselves are familiar with each other, many non-psychology professionals did not strictly observe the principle of confidentiality, and tended to pry into the privacy of others at will. Therefore, the importance of strict adherence to the principle of confidentiality should be reiterated to all participants, including event planners, leaders, lecturers, assistants, and members, and confidentiality agreements should be signed to effectively protect the privacy of teachers.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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