



The Study of the Central Synergistic Role of University Counselors in Responding to Sudden Public Health Emergencies

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Abstract

Prevention and control of public health emergencies have always been an important part of university management. As frontline student managers, university counselors bear the responsibility of information dissemination and emotional support, and should play a crucial role in responding to public health emergencies. By establishing a theoretical model of the central collaborative role of counselors and further validating it through interviews, this paper proposes effective ways to enhance the role of counselors in responding to public health emergencies.

Subject Areas

Higher Education

Keywords

University, Counselor, Public Health Emergency, Central Synergy

1. Introduction

Since the 21st century, the outbreak and re-emergence of infectious diseases such as SARS, H1N1 influenza, and H7N9 avian influenza have had varying degrees of impact on the global economy and society. In recent years, the practice of preventing and controlling the COVID-19 epidemic has deepened the understanding of the prevention and control of public health emergencies throughout society. Higher education institutions have a series of characteristics, such as a high density of personnel and strong mobility, with a high proportion of young students, which present unique requirements for the formulation and implementation of epidemic prevention and control strategies. The information dis-

semination and psychological counseling characteristics of the ideological and political counselors in universities determine that they need to undertake a large amount of collaborative work to ensure timely and reliable implementation of the instructions and requirements of the epidemic prevention and control center in response to public health emergencies including the COVID-19 epidemic. The role of counselors is rarely discussed in previous studies, and this paper tries to propose the pathway how counselors play their role.

2. Central Synergy in College Counselors

2.1. Central Synergy

The original meaning of the term “central” refers to the part of a system that plays a leading role in its center. In the context of responding to public health emergencies in higher education institutions, “central” can be considered the epidemic prevention and control command center at the university or higher level. The “central” makes judgments based on real-time developments of the epidemic, and gives different levels of alerts or response measures. The overall effectiveness of epidemic prevention and control work requires efficient and accurate “synergy” between the “central” and the “periphery”. Through precise and effective mechanisms, the epidemic prevention and control center and every terminal node in the epidemic prevention and control chain can achieve information synergy, emotional synergy, and behavioral synergy, enhancing the operational capacity and effectiveness of the epidemic prevention and control mechanism.

2.2. The Role of University Counselors in the “Central Synergy” Mechanism

During a public health emergency, university counselors play a crucial role in the “Central Synergy” mechanism by serving as a hub for upward feedback on students’ health, academics, and psychological conditions, as well as for downward transmission of government and school policies, plans, and measures. With their central position, they collaborate with all functional departments in emergency management and contribute to the education of students, thus mitigating the harm caused by the emergency. They are a key node in the smooth operation of the entire emergency response mechanism.

In the four different stages of public health emergency management, namely prevention, preparation, response, and recovery, counselors are required to play an important role.

In the prevention and preparation stages, the main work is to establish an emergency response system for public health emergencies, assess risk response capabilities, and store emergency resources and daily infrastructure. As a pivotal role in the emergency response system, university counselors are especially important in ensuring the smooth operation of the response system from the school leadership group to the student population. Feedback from the front line

of student management, including but not limited to real-time collection and summary of data on students' daily health and travel changes, must be genuine and reliable. This is significant for further improving the public health emergency warning level in universities, achieving intelligent continuous monitoring and automatic identification of campus public health risks. [1]

Once a public health emergency occurs within a university, the response stage involves assessing the attributes, characteristics, and development of the situation according to established plans, followed by the adoption of corresponding measures. The emphasis on unified decision-making, unified deployment, and unified action in this stage depends on the rapid response and precise execution of the university counselor group.

In the recovery stage after the event, the university and relevant departments need to review and analyze the problems encountered during the public health emergency, fully understand the actual development of the university's public health work, and deeply care about the thoughts and real needs of teachers and students. In an epidemic situation, every student has actually been negatively affected to some extent. At this point, counselors use diverse risk education and propaganda methods to increase the participation of teachers and students, soothe their emotions, increase crisis and emergency awareness, guide them to adopt scientific and reasonable views and preventive behaviors towards public health emergencies, and represent the school's caring assistance to help students return to normal learning life as soon as possible.

2.3. Challenges Faced by University Counselors in Responding to Public Health Emergencies

Firstly, there is a discrepancy in power and responsibility. In student management work, counselors are regarded as the first guardians of students during their school years. They need to arrive at the scene and participate in the handling of various issues related to students as soon as possible. Counselors have certain decision-making power in dealing with students' daily academic and living problems, but in major events involving students' personal physical and mental health and safety, they need to report to higher-level leaders in a timely manner and contact students' parents. After that, they can only passively respond and wait for step-by-step deployment and arrangements. [2]

Secondly, the power and responsibility are unclear. In responding to public health emergencies, multiple departments of the school are involved in communication and coordination to jointly respond. However, in reality, since counselors are always at the forefront of problem-solving, the absence of related departments' work or counselors' overstepping can lead to counselors assuming responsibilities they are not supposed to and are not good at. Due to the counselors' inadequate level in some professional fields, it may delay the best handling timing.

Thirdly, the mechanism is not sound. Some universities have not yet formed

reasonable and effective warning and recovery mechanisms for public health emergencies. The response mechanisms in the reactive stage also lack scientific and operational characteristics, and the means and measures for solving problems are limited. Routine drills are often just a formality. Once a public health emergency occurs, counselors can only temporarily assume the role of “firefighters”, passively responding solely based on their personal experience, and the results are often unsatisfactory. [3]

3. The Theoretical Model of Central Synergy Role of Counselors

By reviewing literature, summarizing existing research results, and combining with the actual work of counselors, a preliminary theoretical model of central synergy role of counselors was constructed for crisis management in the prevention, preparation, response, and recovery stages of counselors’ response to public health emergencies. The model was built around two work routes, “informational central synergy” and “emotional central synergy”.

Open-ended questions were designed around the observational indicators in the theoretical model, and in-depth exchanges were conducted with 12 counselors and 7 functional department personnel through on-site and telephone interviews. During the interview process, the interviewees were continuously questioned in a rolling manner based on their thinking, and the observational indicators in the model were established based on the interview content, creating a relatively complete and logically related data chain. Finally, the interview records of the interviewees were synthesized to make a consistent judgment.

The comprehensive data obtained through the interview research verified the rationality of the existing theoretical model, adjusted the differences from the initial idea, and finally formed the following theoretical model as shown in **Figure 1**.

The crisis management work of counselors in response to sudden public health emergencies can be divided into four stages: prevention, preparation, response, and recovery.

In the prevention and management stages, counselors mainly play the role of information center, coordinating with the school hospital to carry out public health safety knowledge lectures and simulation exercises for responding to sudden public health emergencies, and enhancing public health awareness and self-protection awareness of student groups. They also work with the student affairs department to select public health volunteers among students, provide specialized training, and reserve professional talents for emergency management.

In the response stage, counselors need to play a dual role in both the information center and the emotional center. By grasping the situation of students as the information hub, counselors work with the college to collect and report information and coordinate with the school hospital to isolate and treat affected students. In case of dormitory or canteen food poisoning incidents, they also work

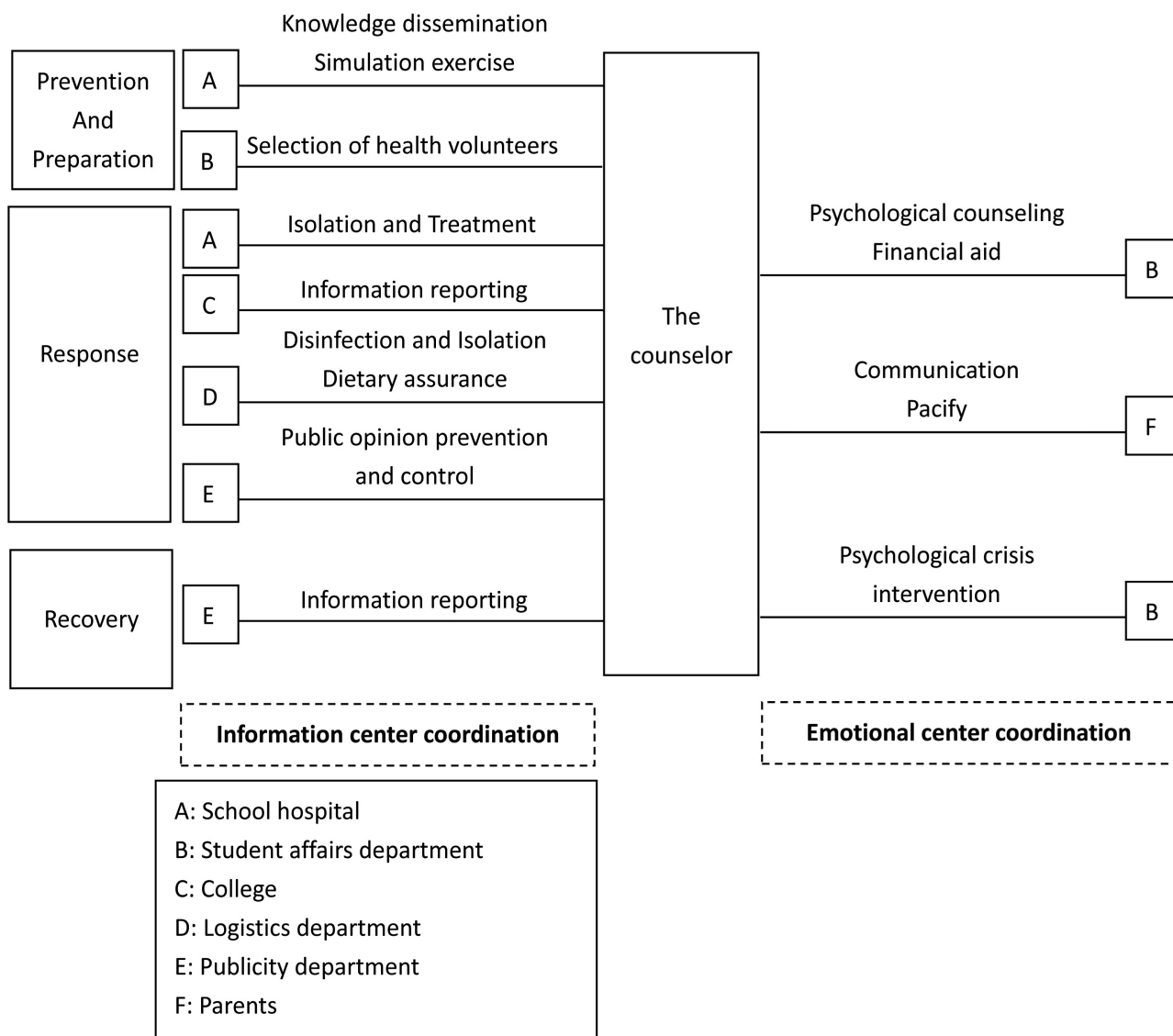


Figure 1. The theoretical model of central synergy role of counselors.

with the dormitory and canteen (logistics department) to investigate and provide follow-up services. Meanwhile, as teachers who have the closest emotional connections with students in school, counselors should coordinate with the psychological counseling center (student affairs department) to provide psychological counseling for affected students, work with the student financial aid center (student affairs department) to provide economic assistance, and communicate with parents to provide emotional support.

In the recovery stage, counselors still need to play both information and emotional center roles, coordinating with the publicity department to report the situation of the incident and meet the students' information needs. They also work with the psychological counseling center (student affairs department) to provide individual psychological health counseling and group psychological health guidance.

4. Unraveling the Pathways to Resolving the Dilemma of the Central Synergistic Role of University Counselors

4.1. Strengthening the “Informational Central Synergy” Function of Counselors

With the development of technology and the process of informatization, counselors in universities need to have the ability of informational central synergy when facing sudden public health emergencies. This involves mastering, collecting, processing, and transmitting information in order to effectively guide students in responding to such emergencies.

In order to strengthen the informational central synergy function of counselors, it is necessary to focus on several aspects:

Firstly, counselors need to enhance their information collection ability. In the event of a sudden public health emergency, counselors need to timely understand the needs and difficulties of students in order to provide better assistance. Therefore, counselors need to master certain information collection techniques, including hot issues that students are concerned about and their psychological status.

Secondly, counselors need to improve their information analysis ability. Counselors need to analyze and judge the collected information in order to formulate better response strategies. For example, counselors can classify and analyze the difficulties faced by students, in order to find the most appropriate way to provide help.

Lastly, counselors need to strengthen their information transmission ability. In a sudden public health emergency, counselors need to timely transmit information regarding policies and epidemic prevention knowledge to students, so that they can better understand the current situation and response strategies. In addition, counselors also need to understand the needs of students and help them obtain relevant information resources. [4]

The above are the key points for strengthening the “informational central synergy” function of counselors. In general, counselors need to enhance their information literacy, improve their analysis and transmission ability, and be proficient in information platforms in order to better respond to sudden public health emergencies.

4.2. Brightening the Foundation of “Emotional Central Synergy” for Counselors

Counselors not only need to possess solid professional knowledge and rigorous thinking skills but also require excellent emotional management abilities when dealing with sudden public health emergencies. These emergencies often cause significant psychological pressure on students, and counselors with inadequate emotional management abilities may make mistakes in emotional communication and psychological counseling, thereby affecting the mental health of students.

Firstly, it is necessary to strengthen the emotional literacy of counselors. Emotional central synergy requires counselors to have certain emotional literacy and emotional intelligence. Emotional literacy refers to a person's cognitive, experiential, and expressive ability regarding emotions, which forms the foundation of emotional competence. Counselors need to have a certain level of self-emotional management ability while understanding and recognizing the emotional needs of students to better carry out emotional synergy work. Only when counselors possess a positive emotional state can they present positive emotional expressions in front of students and guide them to actively respond to sudden public health emergencies.

Secondly, the emotional communication ability of counselors needs to be improved. Emotional communication refers to the ability to express emotions through verbal and nonverbal communication and accept the emotions of others. In practice, counselors need to establish a good relationship with students through effective emotional communication. In sudden public health emergencies, emotional communication becomes even more critical due to the more urgent emotional needs of students. Counselors can carry out emotional communication work with students through channels such as psychological counseling and psychological support.

Thirdly, the emotional serviceability of counselors needs to be enhanced. Emotional service refers to providing students with emotional needs satisfaction through caring, support, and other means. In sudden public health emergencies, students often face a lot of emotional pressure and difficulties, and counselors need to provide emotional services through various means, such as psychological counseling, psychological support, psychological counseling, and psychological crisis intervention. In practice, counselors can understand the emotional needs of students through multiple channels and develop targeted emotional service plans to improve their emotional service level. A team with a collaborative consciousness and collaborative ability is also essential. In sudden public health emergencies, the counselor team needs to work more closely together to jointly respond to the emotional needs of students. The counselor team can enhance the emotional central synergy and improve the level of mental health service by establishing effective communication channels and cooperation mechanisms. Additionally, the counselor team can also strengthen its collaborative ability and improve the emotional central synergy effect through regular team meetings and team-building activities.

It is worth noting that while enhancing the "emotional central synergy" ability of counselors, they also need to pay attention to professional ethics and boundary issues. Counselors need to be clear about their role positioning, avoid crossing professional and personal boundaries, and prevent causing greater harm. [5]

In summary, to enhance the "emotional central synergy" ability of college counselors, it is necessary to focus on emotional insight, emotional expression ability, self-emotional cultivation, and the emotional collaboration of the coun-

selor team. Only through these methods can counselors better protect the mental health of students and meet the challenges of sudden public health emergencies.

4.3. Target-Oriented, Multi-Disciplinary Collaboration, Establishment of the Central Synergistic Role of University Counselors

In responding to sudden public health emergencies, college counselors need to fully leverage their own roles and make efforts in goal orientation, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and promoting innovation in psychological health services and management to establish the central synergistic role of university counselors.

Target-oriented and multi-disciplinary collaboration is essential for college counselors to establish their role advantages in central synergy during sudden public health emergencies. To fully leverage their role, counselors need to focus on target-oriented and multi-disciplinary collaboration, promote innovation in psychological health services and management, and establish their central role in synergy.

In responding to sudden public health emergencies, counselors should establish a target-oriented approach to ensure work effectiveness and efficiency. Firstly, counselors need to fully understand the current situation, including the severity of the public health emergency, the psychological state of students, and the school's management policies, in order to develop reasonable goals. Secondly, counselors need to develop corresponding plans and strategies to ensure the achievement of their goals. For example, counselors can develop psychological intervention plans to provide counseling services to help students relieve stress. Counselors can also collaborate with the school health center to develop epidemic prevention and control plans to ensure students' physical health. Additionally, counselors need to track progress, evaluate and provide feedback on goal achievement, and continuously improve their work plans and strategies.

Implementing strategies to respond to sudden public health emergencies involves multiple departments and fields, including education, health, and public security. Therefore, schools need to strengthen cross-departmental collaboration and promote innovation in psychological health services and management. In practice, this can be achieved through the establishment of cross-departmental coordination mechanisms, strengthening information and resource sharing, and integrating psychological health services and management to improve service effectiveness and quality. In practice, counselors need to collaborate with multiple departments, such as the school health center and student affairs department, to develop epidemic prevention and control plans, organize students to participate in health education activities, and strengthen student health management. Additionally, counselors can work with student organizations and volunteers to promote epidemic prevention knowledge, distribute epidemic prevention materials, and provide necessary assistance to students.

In responding to sudden public health emergencies, counselors need to play a

central synergy role and coordinate with multiple departments and forces. By strengthening counselor team building, promoting emotional central synergy abilities, and promoting innovation in psychological health services and management, counselors can provide more comprehensive and effective psychological health services to students and provide strong support for responding to sudden public health emergencies. Counselors need to improve their own quality, enhance their professional skills, and establish their role advantages in central synergy. [6]

5. Conclusion

In summary, counselors need to strengthen their ability to collect, analyze, and transmit information in order to enhance the function of the "Information Center Synergy". They also need to strengthen their emotional literacy, communication, and service capabilities to enhance the function of the "Emotional Center Synergy." Finally, they should improve their ability to coordinate and cooperate with other departments to ensure the "Central Synergy" function.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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