

The Relationship between the Meaning of Life and Mental Health of Junior Middle School Students of Tujia and Hmong in Xiangxi, China

Xinqiang Wang*, Tianyuan Zhang

School of Psychology & Center of Mental Health Education and Research, Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang, China

Email: *xinqiangw101@163.com

Received 28 March 2016; accepted 23 April 2016; published 28 April 2016

Copyright © 2016 by authors and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

This paper chooses groups of middle school students of the Tujia and the Hmong who both live in ethnic groups and have history of intermarriage and cultural identity between each other as subjects to study the relationship between meaning of life and mental health based on the Xiangxi culture, which aims to provide evidence for the mental health education for middle school students in ethnic regions. Firstly, to resort to the method of Literature Collection: Pay attention to the influence of Xiangxi culture on the meaning of life and the relationship between meaning of life and mental health during the analysis of the material, trying to find out the true meanings; Secondly, using the Purpose-in-Life Test (PIL) and Mental Health Test (MHT), 913 junior high school students were investigated by cluster random sampling method. The results of the study indicated that the total score of meaning of life was significantly correlated with anxiety in people, isolation tendency, allergic tendency and tendency to impulsive ($p < 0.001$), related to the tendency to panic ($p < 0.05$), and the correlation between learning anxiety and self accusation tendency was not significant ($p > 0.05$). In addition, stepwise regression analysis showed that the value of life was the most important factor to predict mental health in meaning of life, and the second was the quality of life and the freedom of life. Therefore, junior high school students' meaning of life and their mental health levels has a certain relationship. Introduction of empirical investigation helps to better research and analyze the relationship between meaning of life and mental health of Chinese people in junior high school in Xiangxi area and provides the basis in the practice of junior high school students' mental health education and life education.

*Corresponding author.

Keywords

Tujia, Hmong, Junior Middle School Students, Meaning of Life, Mental Health

1. Introduction

In recent years, adolescent suicide, homicide and other neglected phenomena in the life dignity and rights have occurred one after another, which will not only influence young people's life value orientation and undermine their health status, formation of cruel, numbness, indifference and personality traits. Reasons of the emergence of the phenomenon of contemporary young people to ignore the phenomenon of life are largely the lack of meaning of life. Therefore, in the face of this situation, life education has become one of the important ways to solve the problem of the life of the contemporary young people.

Previous studies have showed that the meaning of life has an important role in the prevention of mental illness and suicide, mental health and other aspects [1]-[3], which is an important source of mental health. The meaning of life refers to the individual's perception of the meaning and value of their existence. The earliest proposed person "Frankel" thought meaning of life that the most basic primary motivation people had was to pursue the meaning of life, and people would produce emptiness, felt bored, weary when a person was lack of the meaning of life, as well as seriously leading to "heart neurosis" [4]. At the same time, the meaning of life is to maintain and improve an important indicator of the health of body and mind, which will affect young people's physical and mental health, happiness, life satisfaction and suicide attitude of development.

At present, China's researches of meaning of life mainly concentrate on the status of college students and other groups, as well as junior middle school students, especially in the ethnic minority areas of China Xiangxi Tujia and Hmong students. There are few researches of the meaning of life and mental health. At the same time it's known that culture is an important factor influencing contemporary youth life state after examining all sorts of behaviors of the contemporary young people who ignore life, especially unconscious violence of the right to life, and interpreting the profound reasons behind it.

Therefore, the research in cultural perspective attempts to use the questionnaire method to explore the relationship between meaning of life and mental health of junior high school students in ethnic minority areas of China Xiangxi Tujia and Hmong, to in-depth analyze the meaning of life for junior middle school students' mental health and provide empirical evidence and theoretical guidance for junior high school students' mental health education.

2. The Influence of Cultural Background on the Meaning of Life

The meaning of life is the unity of the utility value and the existence value of individual life, which is influenced by many factors. Positive emotions, attitude towards death are important factors in the meaning of life; life autonomy, gratitude, positive emotions are important factors affecting meaning of life. In these important influence factors behind are generally influenced by social culture.

The influence of culture on people has a subtle, profound and lasting characteristic. Juvenile survive in the cultural environment, which has a close contact. Life habits of teenagers root in adolescent life cultural capital obtained. Therefore, in the process of teenagers' life education, cultural capital has an important role, especially national culture on among the meaning of life and mental health of special education.

Traditional Chinese funeral is an important mean of national and social governance, which has a social function of "heavy filial piety, patriarchal clan system, and significant level". However, the funeral ceremony of the individual also has the meaning of life education, "Born to die" is the most vivid, the most direct life education. In Xiangxi, Tujia held the funeral ceremony is not only deal with the dead body, to express grief for the dead, also contains a rich knowledge of life education, the value of life education, focusing on education, people's respect for life, love life, how to live. In a sense, Xiangxi Tujia funeral ceremony is a vivid teaching material learning knowledge of life, processing relationship life, understanding the value of life, education of people's life and knowledge, right in the face of death [death is inevitable, the attribute of life, the source of life, die where], with rich content of life education [5].

As a major carrier of Xiangxi Badai culture, Chinese ethnic minority region in Western Hunan Hmong culture

is full of the meaning of life education. Culture of Xiangxi Hmong Badai is in the circle of the mainstream culture of the witch culture of Hmong, to sacrifice and custom and all kinds of social activities ceremony as the main cultural traits. Badai ritual activities are developed on the basis of ancestor worship. The culture of the Hmong nationality's meaning of life is mainly reflected in two aspects, namely, tenacious life concept and the original ecological ethics [6].

In addition, what is worth mentioning is that Tujia and Hmong who belong to the Chinese ethnic minority region in Western Hunan, are all the ethnic lifestyles, and two family marriage history and each other with deep cultural identity, specifically embodied in the school of earth family, Hmong teacher exchanges; the working contacts of the cadres in the government organizations; common participation in cultural activities; the understanding of their language, customs and habits, eating habits, religious beliefs, and mutual recognition of values [7].

Based on this, this study, from the perspective of culture, selected the junior high school students in Xiangxi Tujia and Hmong as the subjects, to study the relationship between meaning of life and mental health of junior middle school students in Xiangxi minority areas of China.

3. Participants and Methods

3.1. Participants

A total of 996 students of Tujia and Hmong from three middle schools who are in seven grade, eight grade and nine grade in Xiangxi minority area of China were selected to conduct a questionnaire survey. Excluding the invalid questionnaires, a total of 913 valid questionnaires were recovered, of which seven grade students were 354 (38.8%), eight grade students were 306 (33.5%), nine grade students were 253 (27.7%); 429 (47%) were boys and 484 were girls (53%). Adopt the method of the whole class survey, by the unified training of the main test shows that the purpose of the study, students' voluntary participation.

3.2. Method

3.2.1. Literature Collection Methods

In this study, access to relevant literature, specific include the significance of the cultural meaning of life sense of impact studies, ethnic theory research, ethnic relations theory research related papers and ethnography, government departments related national policy documents, archives, and a variety of holiday celebrations. In the analysis of the material analyze the influence of Xiangxi culture on the meaning of life, as well as the relationship between meaning of life and mental health, and strive to find the true meaning.

3.2.2. Evaluation Tool

1) The meaning of life scale. In this study, the Purpose-in-Life test (PIL) Chinese version was revised by Song, Q.R (1992) based on Purpose-in-Life test [8] [9]. This table contains 20 questions, divided into the quality of life (refer to the feelings of life), life value (personal affirmation of their own value of life), life goals (referring to the personal goals for life master degree and sense of practice) and living free (refer to individual autonomy) four dimensions. Likert's Seven Scaling Method is used in a way to answer. The reliability of the scale is good, and the internal consistency coefficient of the scale was 0.89; it also has good construct validity, because life quality, life value, life goal and life freedom are four factors that are more than 1 after analysis of Quadrature axis factor, and the total variation is about 90.32%.

2) Mental Health Test (MHT) [10]. The scale is suitable for the students from grade three in primary school to grade four in high school, which has good reliability and validity. There were 100 items in the test, including 8 contents scale (learning anxiety, anxiety in people, isolation tendency, self accusation, allergic tendency, physical symptom, tendency to panic and tendency to impulsive) and 1 validity scales. Validity scale scores in more than seven thought fraud and not credible, the content table score greater than or equal to 8 points for abnormal, The 8 subscale scores of the total scale and check the standard of not less than 65 points indicates the presence of psychological problems.

3.3. Statistical Methods

Use SPSS13.0 software package for correlation analysis and stepwise regression analysis.

4. Results

4.1. Correlation Analysis between Meaning of Life and Mental Health of Junior Middle School Students of Tujia Nationality and Hmong Nationality in Xiangxi of China

Table 1 shows, total scores of meaning of life with anxiety in people, isolation tendency, allergic tendency and tendency to impulse showed a significant negative correlation ($p < 0.001$), and with tendency to panic was negative correlation ($p < 0.05$), but not significantly correlated with learning anxiety and self blame tendencies. Judging from the meaning in life factor, the quality of life and psychological factors (except learning anxiety, loneliness and self blame tendency) were positively correlated ($p < 0.05$); There was a significant negative correlation between life goal and physical health factors (except learning anxiety and self accusation) ($p < 0.01$); The factors of living free and mental health were positively correlated ($p < 0.05$).

4.2. Regression Analysis of Meaning of Life on Mental Health of Junior Middle School Students of Tujia Nationality and Hmong Nationality in Xiangxi of China

In order to investigate the meaning of life sense of impact on the psychological health and its factors, four factors of meaning of life as predictor variables, eight factors of mental health were used as the criterion variable, and the $\alpha = 0.05$ was taken as the index, and the stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed. It was found that the life value factor entered the regression equation of each factor of predicting mental health; the factors of quality of life entered the regression equation of predicting anxiety in people, allergic tendency and tendency to impulsive; living free factors entered the regression equation of predicting the tendency to Impulsive (see **Table 2**).

Table 1. Correlation between meaning of life and mental health of junior middle school students (n = 913).

	The quality of life	Life goals	Life values	Living free	Meaning of life
Learning anxiety	0.061	-0.059	-0.156***	0.091**	-0.056
Anxiety in people	0.109**	-0.218***	-0.308***	0.075*	-0.199***
Isolation tendency	0.053	-0.213***	-0.325***	0.072*	-0.234***
Self accusation	0.015	-0.004	-0.092**	0.007	-0.045
Allergic tendency	0.081*	-0.110**	-0.203***	0.022**	-0.122***
Physical symptoms	0.078*	-0.171***	-0.321***	0.134***	-0.179***
Tendency to panic	0.103**	-0.144***	-0.186***	0.134***	-0.077*
Tendency to impulsive	0.098**	-0.196***	-0.393***	0.093**	-0.237***

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2. Stepwise regression analysis of meaning of life factors on mental health of junior high school students.

Dependent variable	Predictive variables	R	R ²	ΔR^2	β	T
Learning anxiety	Life values	0.156	0.0244	0.023	-0.237	-5.086***
Anxiety in people	Life values	0.308	0.095	0.094	-0.301	-9.571***
	The quality of life	0.320	0.102	0.100	0.087	2.755**
Isolation tendency	Life values	0.325	0.106	0.105	-0.325	-10.376***
Self accusation	Life values	0.092	0.008	0.007	-0.092	-2.785**
Allergic tendency	Life values	0.203	0.041	0.040	-0.199	-6.115***
	The quality of life	0.214	0.046	0.044	0.066	2.028*
Physical Symptoms	Life values	0.321	0.103	0.102	-0.396	-8.853***
Tendency to panic	Life values	0.186	0.035	0.034	-0.164	-4.945***
	Living free	0.209	0.044	0.042	0.098	2.935**
Tendency to impulsive	Life values	0.393	0.154	0.153	-0.388	-12.723***
	The quality of life	0.399	0.159	0.157	0.069	2.256*

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

5. Discussion and Suggestion

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between meaning of life and mental health of junior middle school students in the cultural background of Xiangxi Tujia and Hmong. The study found that the meaning of life and mental health factor (except for learning anxiety and self accusation tendency correlation that were not significant) showed significant negative correlation, indicating that the higher the individual level of perception of the significance and value of their own existence was, the anxiety and behavior produced by the anxiety would be reduced. The results also support the research on the relationship between meaning of life and mental health in foreign countries to some extent. In other words, the meaning of life plays an important role in the prevention of mental illness and mental health [1] [3] [7]. Further regression analysis finds that the life value in meaning of life has a significant predictive effect on mental health factors and the quality of life of anxiety in people, allergic tendency and tendency to impulsive significant predictive effect, which shows that their own value affirmation is satisfied with the present life, the higher the individual psychological health level is, the less psychological disease you have. Therefore, in the middle school to strengthen the meaning of life, especially to enhance the value of life and quality of life of the intervention, it is helpful to enrich and perfect the connotation of mental health education.

The study also found that the living free and mental health factors (in addition to self dumping) were significantly positively correlated, which showed that the more independent of their own life, the higher the level of mental health; The value of life and mental health factors, life goals and mental health factors (in addition to learning anxiety and self accusation tendency related not significant) had significantly negative correlation, which shows that the more positive value of their own lives and the higher degree of mastery of life goals and practical sense are helpful to reduce their anxiety and behavior caused by anxiety. Finally, the study also finds that in meaning of life of the various factors, only the freedom of life can significantly predict the terror tendency, which shows that the strength of individual autonomy plays an important role in reducing the terrorist tendency.

Based on the results of this study, the researchers believe that, first of all, in the junior high school students' mental health education, the important influence of meaning of life should be given full consideration on junior high school students' mental health. In particular, in the life value and life attitude education, we find the factors that affect the value of life in time, timely comforting, intervention and counseling. Because one of the uniqueness of Hunan life lies in the pursuit of meaning and people through the pursuit of the meaning of life achieve the value of life and Hunan being's pursuit of meaning provides the power for the existence and development of Hunan-being to a certain extent, "It is the meaning of Hunan being that illuminates the existence of Hunan being, and it is also the existence of Hunan being, which is put forward and verified by Hunan being". Junior middle school students are in the life of the outlook, values and world view formed, many psychologists define as the storm period, so they are always changing and extremely sensitive and there is no fixed interest and firm position, in such a period of life, they are very easy to feel lonely, worry, emptiness, boredom and frustration. Therefore, the Hunan essence should be a meaning of existence value of entity, and the ultimate value of education is for the development of Hunan life and the pursuit of meaning. As one of the educational categories, the important value of life education is to guide the growth of young people's life and guide the young people to explore the meaning of life [11]. Therefore, it's very important to give this stage of the individual's life values education, so that it has a clear life goal and sense of value to enhance their meaning of life, thus improving the level of students' mental health.

Secondly, the whole life is the harmony and unity of the natural life and its cultural life, in different countries, different regions and different religious beliefs, which will have different ways of life values education, indicating that education is rooted in the cultural background. Therefore, the youth's life education should be guided by the culture to realize the pursuit of the meaning of life. In addition, as the Xiangxi Tujia and Hmong people's awareness of life, the essence of education is "cultural cultivation", rather than the traditional sense of "cultural transmission". Jaspers also stood in the perspective of cultural influence, who thought "culture wake up and self realization of the intermediary through the exchange of language intermediary as a factor of culture". Whether it is knowledge, skills, or life, the function of youth life education is to cultivate the life of young people [12]. So for teenagers, as a specific culture, life is culture of origin and destination to let the cultural elements be into teenagers' life education, so that young life will beyond reality directly and instinctively access to universal life because of the influence of culture of life.

6. Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

Partial limitations may affect the accuracy of the research results. On the one hand, our research is to collect data in a period of time, but the results of the data analysis can not reveal the cause and effect relationship. Future researches need further study through using longitudinal research methods, to evaluate the possibility of a causal relationship among Hmong, Tujia culture and the meaning of life, as well as the causal relationship between the meaning of life and mental health.

On the other hand, no comparison with other social groups which can't accept Hmong and Tujia cultural education, will affect the accuracy of the results. Future researches can focus on educational experimental design which can be compared with other groups, to further verify the effect of the culture of Hmong and Tujia culture on the meaning of life, and to explore the influence of counseling of life meaning on mental health.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by the Science Foundation for Young Scholars of Jiangxi Province (20151BAB215033), Youth Project of Science and Technology Research of Jiangxi Provincial Department of Education (GJJ150317), and the Postdoctoral Science Foundation of Jiangxi Province (2014KY52, 2014RC11).

References

- [1] Wang, X.Q., Zhang, D.J., Wang, J.L., Xu, H. and Xiao, M. (2010) Effects of Supervised Movie Appreciation on the Improvement of College Students' Life Meaning Sense. *Heath*, **2**, 804-810. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/health.2010.27121>
- [2] Kim, Y.J. and Lee, K.J. (2010) Relationship of Social Support and Meaning of Life to Suicidal Thoughts in Cancer Patients. *Journal of Korean Academy of Nursing*, **40**, 524-532. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4040/jkan.2010.40.4.524>
- [3] Zika, S. and Chamberlain, K. (1992) On the Relation Meaning in Life and Psychological Well-Being. *British Journal of Psychology*, **83**, 133-145. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8295.1992.tb02429.x>
- [4] Frankel, V.E. Zhao, K.S., *et al.* (1991) Man's Search for Meaning. SDX Joint Publishing Company, Beijing, 90-92.
- [5] Sheng, H.G. (2012) Study on Life Education Factors of Xiangxi Tujia Nationality in the Funeral Ceremony. *Nationalities Forum*, No. 18, 98-101.
- [6] Liu, J.B. and Zhang, W.J. (2011) Look at the Life Consciousness from the Badai Culture of Miao Nationality in Xiangxi. *The Vicissitudes of Life*, No. 6, 110-112.
- [7] Ho, M.Y., Cheung, F.M. and Cheung, S.F. (2010) The Role of Meaning in Life and Optimism in Promoting Well-Being. Personality and Individual Differences. *Personality and Individual Differences*, **48**, 658-663. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2010.01.008>
- [8] Song, Q.R. (1992) Study of the Meaning of Life for Teenagers. Master Thesis, Counseling Institute of Changhua Normal University, Changhua.
- [9] Crumbaugh, J.C. (1968) Cross-Validation of Purpose-in-Life Test Based on Frankl's Concepts. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, **24**, 74-81.
- [10] Zhou, B.C. (1991) Mental Health Test. East China Normal University Press, Shanghai.
- [11] Qin, L., Wang, X.Q., and Zhang, D.J. (2013) On Middle-School Students' Meaning in Life the Characteristics of Its Development and Its Relationship with Learning Motivation and Academic Achievement. *Journal of Southwest University (Natural Science Edition)*, **35**, 165-170.
- [12] Cui, S.H. (2013) From the Perspective of Culture on Teenagers' Life Education. Doctoral Dissertation, Henan University, Kaifeng.