



Adolescent mental health in China requires more attention

Self-harm during adolescence can be associated with future suicide attempts.¹

In China, rapid socioeconomic development has been associated with changes in social structure, discrepancies in development between urban and rural areas, a rapid increase in the urban population, increased social pressure and competition, and changes in family structure. For teenagers, high academic requirements and psychological pressure can lead to an increase in negative emotions. Worldwide, the prevalence of non-suicidal self-harm in children and adolescents is about 19.5%;² however, in China, estimated prevalence in middle school students (aged 13–18 years) is 27.4%.³

Non-suicidal self-harm behaviour is not only an issue for psychiatry, but also a complex societal issue. With 189 million school children and about 28 million undergraduate college students in China,⁴ the scale of the issue could be enormous.

The Healthy China Action (2019–30) plan includes explicit references to initiatives to promote both mental health and school students' health.⁵

In December 2019, the Chinese Health Commission, Ministry of Education, and ten other government departments launched a joint action plan with a specific focus on child and adolescent mental health. The action plan mandated that by 2022, all levels and types of school should set up psychological service platforms to provide mental health services to students, and 60% of mental health hospitals that at or above the second level (ie, between basic and high level medical services in the Chinese system) should set up outpatient services for children and adolescents. All regions of China are to set up or improve access to psychological assistance hotlines,

and promote mental health awareness among children and adolescents, with the aim of reaching 80% of this population.⁶

Although the government has introduced important policies that give more attention to mental health, more research and guidance for professionals are needed to establish an interconnected mental health system, which could provide the professional services for schools, communities, and families, and improve the mental health and wellbeing of adolescents in China.

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