

# The Mental Health of Ethnic Minority College Students in Southwest China——Problems and Causes

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**Abstract:** The mental health problems of ethnic minority college students are related to the development of the overall level of education in China. The purpose of this study is to identify the mental health problems and causes of ethnic minority college students. This study uses a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative research to collect and analyse specific data through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. This study selected a sample of 300 minority college students from three public universities in southwest China. The total sample size of the semi-structured interview is 8, including 5 minority college students and 3 teachers who are responsible for teaching management of minority college students. This study found that minority college students had depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, interpersonal sensitivity, somatisation, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation and psychoticism. The causes of these mental health problems include cultural, family and lifestyle habits, politics and rhetoric, emotions, communication and other factors. This study may have some reference value for focusing on the mental health of minority college students and school institutions, and they may find ways to help and solve the mental health problems of minority college students.

**Keywords:** Mental Health; Ethnic Minority College Students; Cognitive Dissonance

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## 1. Introduction

China is a multi-ethnic country consisting of Han and 55 ethnic minorities, but the proportion of minority students is very low. According to data released by the Chinese Ministry of Education on 30 August 2021, there are a total of 3,289,489 minority college students in China, accounting for 10.01% of all college students nationwide. The ethnic identity and perceived prejudice of minority college students in southwest China, who live in areas where Han Chinese also live, have a negative impact on their mental health (Yao & Yang, 2017). Combining the characteristics of the more concentrated minority universities in southwest China, this study aims to explore the mental health problems and causes of minority college students in southwest China.

## 2. Research Methodology

Based on interpretivism, this study used a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative research. A questionnaire sample of 300 minority college students, concentrated between the ages of 18 and 24, was selected for this study. The mental health scales used in the questionnaire were based on the Symptom Checklist-90 (SCL-90), the Self-Rating Depression Scale (SDS), and the Self-Rating Anxiety Scale (SAS). Five minority students and three teachers responsible for teaching and managing minority students were also selected for semi-structured interviews.

## 3. Mental Health Problems of Ethnic Minority College Students

In this study, 300 minority students were selected as the sample for the questionnaire. One hundred minority students were selected from each of the three universities. In this study, 300 questionnaires were distributed and 292 questionnaires were returned with a response rate of 97.33%. After eliminating 4 invalid questionnaires, 288 valid questionnaires were returned with an efficiency rate of 98.63% and the final sample counted was 288.

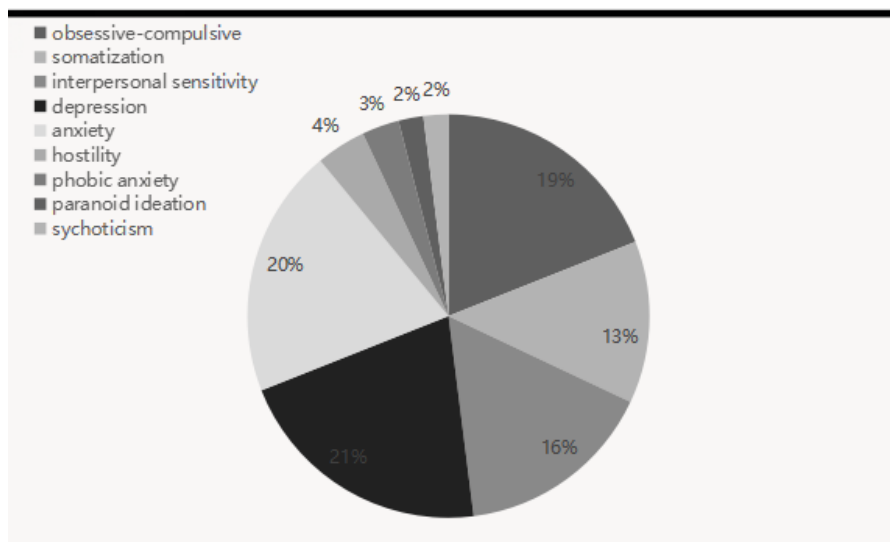


Figure 4.1 The percentage of mental health problems among ethnic minority college students

Minority college students had a variety of different mental health problems, depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, interpersonal sensitivity, somatisation, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoia and psychoticism. A higher percentage of minority students showed depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder and interpersonal sensitivity. In addition, this study found that those minority students who had integrated with Han Chinese culture earlier and to a greater extent had a lower percentage of mental health problems. In contrast, minority students who integrated with Han Chinese later and to a lesser extent were more likely to have interpersonal sensitivity and hostility.

#### 4. Causes of Mental Health Problems among Ethnic Minority College Students

There are many cultural differences between minority cultures and Han cultures. After the minority college students enter the university, they feel the integration and divergence between their ethnic culture and Han culture, and this cultural conflict obviously makes the minority college students feel difficult to adapt, which leads to stress, isolation, anxiety, sensitivity and other mental health problems. At the same time, minority students usually study in their hometowns before going to university. And the level of education in the places where minority groups live is generally low, so minority college students have a lower level of knowledge than Han college students after entering university. Such a difference in knowledge level makes minority students feel inferior to other Han Chinese students, resulting in mental health problems such as inferiority, sensitivity and depression. From the point of view of family and living habits, whether in terms of living habits, family environment or education, there are big differences between minority college students and Han Chinese college students. In addition, the economic development of minority regions is relatively backward, and many minority students' families are not in a good financial condition.

Some Han Chinese students may discriminate against minority students because of this, which reinforces the inferiority complex of minority students. In terms of policy and discourse, minority college students enjoy some special policy advantages, they can enjoy extra points in the college entrance examination, which makes some Han college students feel that they are treated unfairly, and every student in China is under great pressure to go to higher education, and some Han students may engage in unfriendly behaviour such as discrimination and assault against minority students. At the same time, some social remarks aggravate the conflict between Han and minority students, which makes it impossible for minority students to be treated kindly at university, which also makes minority students have mental health problems to varying degrees.

The pupils interviewed showed varying degrees of loneliness, anger and irritability, anxiety, feelings of discrimination and low self-esteem. They find it difficult to find a sense of belonging when they come into contact with teachers and classmates who are completely unfamiliar and different. Most minority students find it difficult to adapt to university life and, for a variety of reasons, experience a strong sense of loneliness. At the same time, in the new environment, which is completely different from the minority areas, they not only have difficulty adjusting to the new life and study, but also have difficulty adjusting to their new classmates. ethnic minority college students do not get along well with their Han Chinese classmates, and conflicts sometimes arise between them. They often feel discriminated against by their Han Chinese classmates. Such conflicts can also make minority students feel uncomfortable and irritable. In addition, some minority students adopt an avoidant attitude to face all this. They are afraid to integrate into the new

university environment and reject contact with Han Chinese students. It is difficult for them to find confidence in their new life, they seem to have low self-esteem and gradually close themselves off.

Most minority students use their own ethnic language when they are in their home town. After they entered college, they were exposed to Mandarin most of the time, and the language difference often caused some communication barriers between them and their teachers and classmates. And some minority college students are unable to communicate with their Han classmates in standard Mandarin because of the accent problem, and sometimes they are ridiculed by their Han classmates because of the accent problem. Apart from the language difference, some minority students tend to isolate themselves or only communicate with students of the same ethnicity as themselves.

## 5. Conclusion

This study is based on the theory of cognitive dissonance, after minority college students enter university, they face cultural differences, cultural conflicts, differences in living habits, and a large number of these conflicts can lead to cognitive conflicts among minority college students, they face conflicts between new cognition and old cognition, which can lead to nervous discomfort, resulting in psychological imbalance and a series of mental health problems. Ethnic minorities who had earlier and greater integration with Han Chinese in terms of lifestyle and culture retained less of their own ethnic culture. These minority students had a lower percentage of physical health problems. Minority college students from different minority groups have focused and concentrated mental health problems. Most minority college students do not know how to deal with these stresses and tend to adopt an avoidance attitude, and these pent-up stresses gradually lead to various mental health problems. discrimination and low self-esteem.

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