



Research Article

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Research on Differences in Mental Status of Freshmen in Vocational Undergraduate Colleges

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the current psychological situation of freshmen in vocational undergraduate colleges, and to grasp the psychological characteristics among different student groups, providing theoretical basis and data support for the subsequent mental health education of freshmen. The sample of the study was selected from 1980 freshmen of vocational undergraduate colleges in Guangdong Province, and the findings were statistically analyzed. The results showed that, in terms of overall stress, male students were under more pressure, and arts students were under more pressure than science students. Junior college students suffered more stress than undergraduates, and most of the students adopt positive ways to cope with the pressure; students in vocational colleges were open-minded about relationships and sexuality; urban students had better interpersonal skills than rural students. Compared with college students, undergraduates preferred their majors. Undergraduate students had higher overall satisfaction with themselves and as for the identity of "vocational college students", male students were stronger than female students, while students from rural areas were higher than those from urban areas.

Keywords: Vocational Undergraduate college, Freshmen, Psychological Situation, Variance Analysis

1. Introduction

Undergraduate vocational education is an important part of the modern vocational education system, and the development of undergraduate vocational education has further met the needs of China's industrial transformation and upgrading and the sustainable development of vocational talents (Y. Wang, 2013). In recent years, with the national support for vocational education, especially vocational undergraduate education, and especially the release of "Article 20 of Vocational Education", the development of vocational undergraduate education has entered the fast lane (J. Guo, 2020). This has

led to an influx of students with a relatively good foundation of learning ability in vocational colleges, who have scores close to or even higher than those of ordinary undergraduates and have good confidence and enthusiasm in their daily studies. However, the idea of “only academic qualifications” still exists in the current society, as well as the backward admission batch in the process of higher vocational colleges, which leads to higher vocational students regard higher vocational education as “second-class education”, resulting in serious inferiority complex, which affects their mental health(W. Sun, 2010). Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research on students’ psychological well-being, especially those at undergraduate level. In a review of previous studies on vocational colleges, it is found that most of the students are mainly junior college students.

Qiu Kaijin (2007) found in his study of junior college students in vocational colleges that these students have low confidence in learning due to “growth setbacks” or “growth failures”, which leads to high levels of boredom and low learning efficiency, as well as that a large number of “ young college students” (i.e. those who enter vocational colleges directly after graduating from junior high schools), and the findings on the psychological status of these junior college students and the focus of mental health education in schools are not applicable to the undergraduates in vocational colleges. Studying the psychological profile of the undergraduate students is the first question to be explored in this study.

The current mental health education in vocational colleges neither fully grasps the differences between groups nor respects the uniqueness of different members within them, and suffers from the problem of generalized goal setting, leading to a lack of relevance of the work(Q. Huang, 2019). The study found that there were significant differences in the mental health of different academic levels and gender groups(L. Zhen-ya et al., 2017; L. Shang et al., 2008), as well as significant differences in test anxiety, psychological defense styles, and even mental health status among students of different majors(H. Cheng, 2006; X. Han et al., 2004; F. Wu et al., 2007). So the second aim of this study is to investigate what differences exist in the psychological status of different groups of students in vocational colleges, particularly between students of different academic levels.

In summary, this study intends to reveal the psychological status of different student groups and the psychological differences between them through a survey on the psychological conditions of university freshmen in a vocational undergraduate college in Guangdong Province, which provides a theoretical basis and data support for the development of mental health education in vocational undergraduate colleges.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

In this study, freshmen in a vocational college in Guangdong Province were selected as the research object. The convenient sampling method was used for questionnaire survey. A total of 2,100 self-administered questionnaires were distributed and 1,980 valid questionnaires were eventually obtained, with a validity rate of 94.29%. The overall situation of the sample is listed in Table 1.

2.2 Measures

The self-made questionnaire is prepared by means of personal interview and group discussion, combined with previous relevant research to select some common issues among the vocational students(K. Qiu, 2007; Y. Yin, 2019), mainly covering interpersonal communication, relationships, career development, studies, stress situation and coping styles, and internet addiction.

2.3 Measurements and Statistical Analysis

The questionnaires were completed within two months of the freshmen's enrollment. Data entry was done using Epi Date 3.1 software, and the results were statistically analyzed using SPSS 17.0 software.

Table 1: Overall sample profile

Sex Ratio (%)		Subject Type (%)		Academic Level (%)		Birthplace (%)	
Male	Female	arts	science	Undergraduate	Junior college	rural	urban
904 (45.66)	1076 (54.34)	1053 (53.18)	927 (46.82)	911 (46.01)	1069 (53.99)	1194 (60.30)	786 (39.70)

3. Results

3.1 Analysis of Differences in Interpersonal Skills and Characteristics

This study conducted an independent sample t-test on the interpersonal skills of vocational students and found that only significant differences in interpersonal skills between students of different domicile locations, with urban students having significantly higher than those of rural students ($t=4.48$, $P<0.001$). Apart from this, there were no significant differences ($P_s \geq 0.08$) in interpersonal communication skills between students of different genders, academic levels, or arts and science subjects. The results of the survey on the sources of friends of vocational students are shown in Figure 1. The results found that close friends mainly came from within the campus, such as classmates or roommates; however, it is worth noting that the selection rate of both types of friends from the Internet and other aspects of society was significantly higher for junior college students than for undergraduates ($\chi^2=35.72$, $\chi^2=68.26$, $P_s < 0.001$).

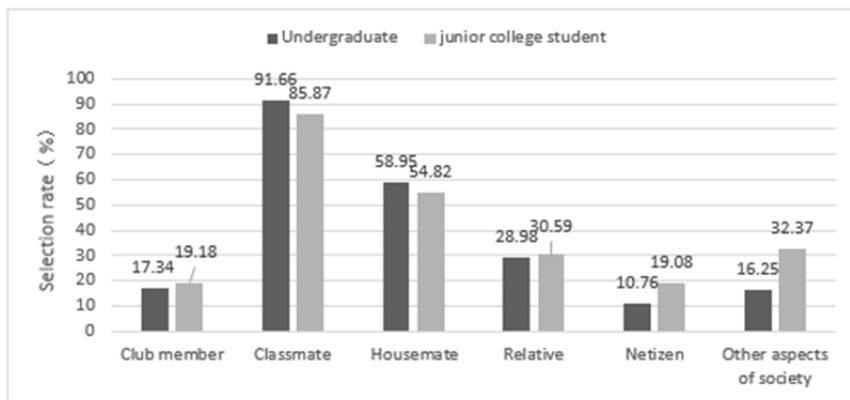


Figure 1: Sources of friends

3.2 The Current Situation of Love and Sexual Knowledge Acquisition Channels

A survey on the "views of freshmen on love" found that about 79.34% of students chose "agree" or "strongly agree" to the question "Do you think falling in love is a normal psychological need?" This means that love during college is already accepted by most students. In addition, the results of the survey on the "ways to obtain sexual knowledge" are shown in Figure 2, which shows that digital media channels have become the main channels for obtaining sexual knowledge among higher

education students, followed by school education and communication among peers, and the ways to obtain sexual knowledge are generally diversified.

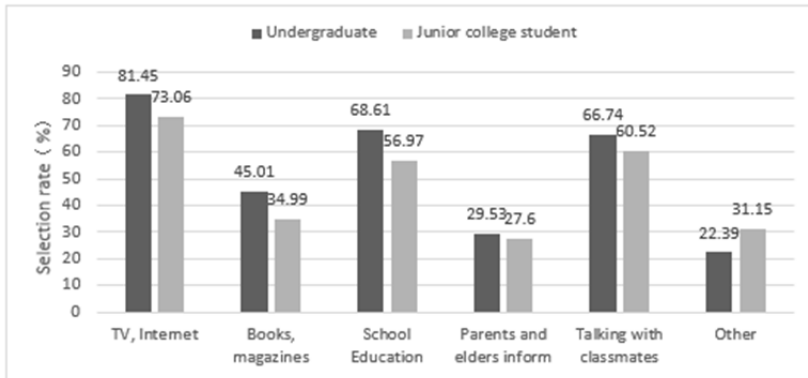


Figure 2: Access to sexual knowledge

3.3 Stress Situation Variance Analysis and Current Status of Stressors and Coping Styles

In this study, independent sample t-tests were conducted on the stress situation of freshmen in vocational colleges in terms of gender, arts and science subjects, level of education and type of domicile, and the results are shown in Table 2. The results show that in terms of their stress, males are significantly higher than females, arts students are significantly higher than science students, and junior college students are significantly higher than undergraduates.

Table 2: A Comparison of Stress Profiles of Different Student Groups

	Stress situation ($\bar{x} \pm s$)	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Gender		2.87	<0.001
Male	3.07±0.84		
Female	2.96±0.75		
Subjects		-2.25	0.02
Arts	2.97±0.79		
Science	3.05±0.80		
level of education		-4.76	<0.001
undergraduate	2.92±0.70		
junior college	3.09±0.86		
type of domicile		-0.49	0.62
urban area	3.00±0.85		
rural area	3.02±0.76		

The results of the survey on the sources of stress among senior undergraduate students are shown in Figure 3, which shows that academic performance, financial problems and career development are the main sources of stress for vocational students. It is noteworthy that both academic achievement and peer interaction are significantly more selected by undergraduates than junior college students ($\chi^2=100.58$, $\chi^2=33.64$, $P_s < 0.001$), but financial aspects are significantly more selected by junior college students than undergraduates ($\chi^2=11.90$, $p < 0.001$). There is no significant difference in the choice of the remaining stressors between undergraduate and junior college students ($P_s \geq 0.20$).

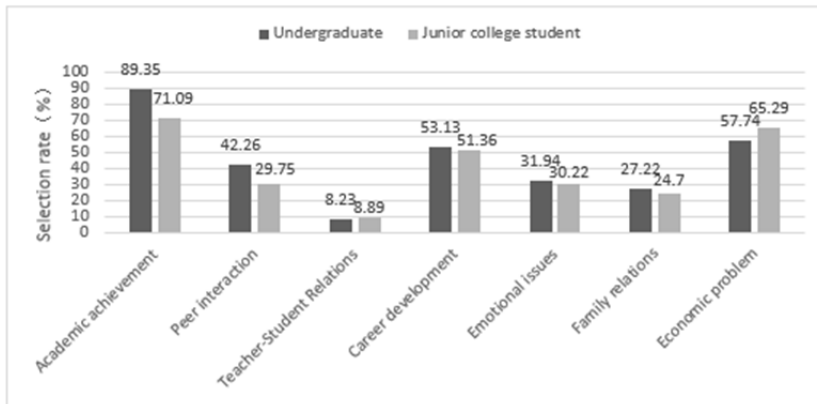


Figure 3: Sources of stress

The results of the survey on vocational students' coping styles are shown in Figure 4, Referring to the simple Coping Style Scale developed by Xie Yaning(1998), items 1-5 were classified as positive coping styles and items 6-8 were classified as negative coping styles in this study. The results show that most students still use positive coping styles, but communication with their parents is still relatively low, and the help from school counselling is obviously insufficient; in terms of negative coping, undergraduates mainly use eating and sleeping to alleviate (avoid) the problem, and more undergraduates also choose to play games for catharsis.

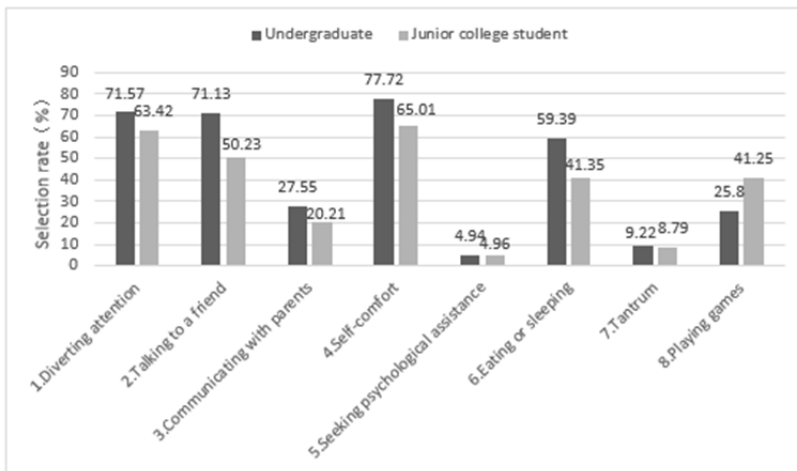


Figure 4: Coping styles

3.4 Analysis of Study and Career Goals and Reasons for Attending Schools

In this study, an independent sample t-test was conducted on the clarity of higher vocational students' Study or Career goals, and found that there was no significant difference between students of different academic levels ($t=0.95$, $p=0.34$), while the survey on the popularity of their major was significantly higher among undergraduates than junior college students ($t=3.85$, $p<0.001$). Secondly,

for the question 'Why do you attend your current school', the results are shown in Figure 5. The results show that the main factors influencing students' choice of higher vocational college were "my wish" and "poor academic performance", with the latter choice being significantly higher among undergraduates than junior college students ($\chi^2=116.85$, $p < 0.001$).

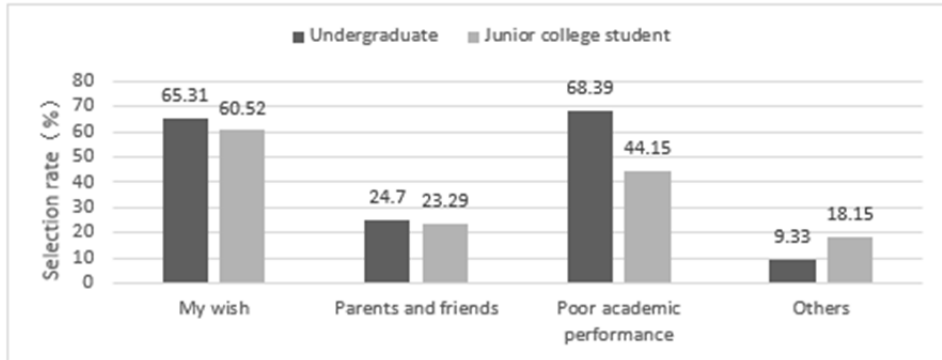


Figure 5: Reasons for attending

3.5 Analysis of Differences in Identity, Self-satisfaction and Inferiority

An independent sample t-test was conducted on the three aspects of Identity, Self-satisfaction and Self-esteem of vocational students. The results of the independent sample t-test found that the only significant difference was in Self-satisfaction, which was significantly higher among undergraduates than junior college students ($t=2.72$, $p=0.01$), but not in the other two areas ($P_s \geq 0.20$). There were only significant differences in the Identity of vocational students between genders and domiciles, with male students having a significantly higher identity than female students and rural students having a significantly higher identity than urban students ($t=3.25$, $t=2.71$, $P_s \leq 0.01$), while there were no significant differences in the other two categories ($P_s \geq 0.34$).

3.6 Differential Analysis of Internet Addiction

An independent sample t-test was conducted on the internet addiction of vocational students by gender, high school choice of subject, level of education and type of domicile, and the results showed that only significant differences existed between the different gender groups of students, i.e. the level of internet addiction was significantly higher among female students than male students ($t=2.68$, $p=0.01$). In addition, no significant differences existed between the other groups in terms of internet addiction ($P_s \geq 0.16$).

4. Discussion

This study analyses common psychological conditions of vocational students to capture the current psychological status of students and the differences that exist in terms of different educational levels and demographic variables.

In terms of interpersonal communication, there is a significant difference between the interpersonal skills of students from different domiciles, with rural students being significantly lower than their urban counterparts, which is consistent with the results of previous studies (L. Gan et al., 2007), probably due to the fact that urban students have a broader social network and richer social experience. On the other hand, the first problem rural students face when they come to university is to adapt to the urban culture, and the cultural differences between urban and rural areas also have an impact on their interpersonal interactions to a certain extent (K. Lu, 2005).

The survey found that higher vocational students have an open attitude towards relationships, and the formation of this result is directly related to the development of the times and the openness and tolerance of social culture. Jiang Jianping et al. (2000) found in a survey on the sexual attitudes of university students at the end of the last century that about 40% of students explicitly opposed sexual liberation and about 70% of students thought that premarital sex should be cautious, while Bin et al. (2008) found in a survey on university students in 2005 that over 80% of students thought that university students should have sex. These two sets of findings from different time periods also illustrate the impact of social development on people's attitudes towards relationships and sexuality.

This is in line with previous research findings that males are significantly higher than females in terms of the stress experienced by higher vocational students (Z. Lin et al., 2006), this may be due to the fact that society expects more from men, to carry the burden of the family, to achieve greater success, to attain a higher social status, all of which inadvertently increases the pressure on men. In addition, arts students are significantly bearing more stressed than science students, possibly due to the different coping strategies used by students in different disciplines when faced with problems. Compared to science students, arts students are more likely to adopt negative coping styles, such as blaming themselves and avoiding, which are not conducive to stress management, while science students are more likely to actively face and try to solve problems (F. Wu et al., 2007). It is worth noting that the overall pressure on junior college students is significantly higher than that on undergraduates, which may be related to the current social "discrimination" against junior college students, the severe employment situation, and even the lack of understanding and support from families, which all exert greater pressure to some extent.

In terms of how much vocational students like their majors, undergraduate students are significantly higher than junior vocational students. This is mainly due to the higher scores of senior undergraduate students in the entrance examinations and the lower score line at the back of the admission batches of vocational colleges, which makes them more likely to be enrolled in their desired majors and also enhances the self-satisfaction of undergraduate students to a certain extent.

The results of the self-satisfaction of vocational students were significantly higher for undergraduates than for juniors, due to the fact that juniors had experienced academic setbacks and had failed the entrance examination, which had led to a stronger sense of frustration (Y. Zhang, 2011). In terms of students' sense of identity as Higher Vocational Student, male students are significantly more likely than female students, and rural students are significantly more likely than urban students. Tajfel (1981) suggests that social identity is a function of how individuals perceive the identity of the group, which is influenced by the context in which they are placed and the culture of the society. The perception of vocational education in society is more "technicians", which is also inconsistent with the expectations of society for women and is not conducive to the establishment of women's identity. For rural students, they are more eager to learn a skill and earn a living in the society, which contributes to their acceptance of the status of Higher Vocational Student.

In terms of internet addiction among vocational students, female students have a higher addiction level, which may be explained by the fact that female students are more likely to adopt a passive and retreating way of coping with problems (D. Yun et al., 2006), preferring to avoid real problems by using mobile phones and socializing on the internet rather than traditional face-to-face communication (H. Huang et al., 2013; Y. Li et al., 2016).

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