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Implications of positive psychology in community service guidance practice: A group intervention for community children

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ABSTRACT: *Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) has been widely used in the world with children and has achieved good results. In recent years, PPIs has been carried out among college students in China and has achieved certain results. In contrast, there is little use in Chinese children. In order to verify the effect of PPIs on children in Chinese communities, so that we can provide an effective way to serve children in the community. This study adopted the method of experimental research, and compared the effect of PPIs on the improvement of positive psychological quality of children in communities by pre - and post-test. The results showed that through PPIs, the positive psychological quality of children in the community was significantly improved, and it was not affected by gender, grade and whether they came from a single parent family. But this improvement is only an overall improvement, not an improvement in every quality. Which quality can be improved depends on which PPIs program is used. Therefore, this study suggests that PPIs can be widely used in children in the community, but it needs to be measured before intervention, and the appropriate PPIs program should be accurately selected according to the measured results.*

Key words: *Chinese children, Group intervention, Positive psychology interventions, Positive psychology.*

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1. Introduction

Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) has been widely concerned for a long time, and in recent years, it has also achieved good experimental results when it is involved in children. A comprehensive study found that multi-objective and multi-component classroom positive psychology intervention can affect American pupils' mental health (subjective well-being: life satisfaction, positive emotion and negative emotion (Hearon,

2017). PPIs can be considered effective for decrease depression and increase the emerge of the role of witness in bullying in South Brazil (Pureza, Lisboa, & Marin, 2020). An Australian work reviews the effects of PPIs between school-based and clinically-based children and adolescents. Them designed a new 3 x 3 classification of PPIs, which involves 9 different types of interventions, suggests the use of PPIs in school and clinical contexts is strongly advised (Owens & Waters, 2020). Another more international study used the meta-analysis extracted data from 347 studies that involving over 72,000 participants from non-clinical and clinical child and adult in 41 countries, evaluated the effect of PPIs, which contains multiple formats and contexts, with an average of ten sessions over six weeks. As a result, PPIs had a significant small to medium effect at post-test on strengths, well-being, depression, stress, anxiety and quality of Life. These effects last for up to three months. More importantly, this study found participants with clinical problems in non-western countries, who engaged in longer or group therapy programs containing multiple PPIs benefited most (Carr et al., 2021). This suggests that PPIs do work in one way or another in children, and that children come from non-western countries are more sensitive to them.

2. Positive Psychology in China

In fact, China has long paid attention to the study of positive psychology. Hou and Zhang (2017) summarized this history and divided positive psychology research in China in the past 10 years into five stages through Visual Analysis of literature in CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) database from 2007 to 2017. The first stage: 2007-2008, positive mental health education theory research gradually mature and began to explore the practice. In this period, the main research objects are college students, left-behind children and teenagers. The second stage: 2009-2010, positive mental health education research officially entered the theoretical and practical research period. This period began to focus on primary and secondary school students, young children, migrant children, poor college students, students with learning difficulties, etc., the content also began to pay attention to students' depression and other specific mental health problems, and began to summarize and think about the promotion experience of some experimental schools. The Scale was active during this period. The third stage: 2011-2012, positive mental health education research has entered a stage of deepening development. During this period, the research object continued to expand, and began to focus on the positive mental health education and positive mental quality training of different types of students such as college freshmen, secondary vocational students, vocational students, postgraduates, and exceptional children. "Confidence", "subjective well-being", "happy school", "happy education", "psychological capital" and "psychological crisis" were active in this period. The fourth stage: 2013-2014, positive mental health education research continued to develop. One of the characteristics of this period is the focus on education methods and ways, such as "group psychological counselling", "reading therapy" and so on. The fifth stage: 2015-2017, positive mental health education research booming stage. From the perspective of the research content, it focuses on the relationship between students' frustration psychology, social support and positive psychological quality, the relationship between parents and students' mental health, and the infiltration of positive mental health education into subject teaching. In recent years, there have also been studies focusing on children. Survey research, invited 1416 primary and secondary school students in western China, verified the students come from different families show different levels in positive psychology characters. their positive psychological characters helped significantly negatively predict their mental health problems, and sincerity, prudence, and cooperation helped negatively predict various psychological problems (Zhang, Yao, Zhang, & Wu, 2017). Another questionnaire survey of rural left-behind children from Central China showed that there were significant differences in 15 positive psychological qualities between the low-insight social support group and the high-insight social support group. Peer support, school support, bullying and discrimination were significantly correlated with 15 positive psychological qualities of left-behind children. In addition to modesty quality, family support was significantly correlated with other 14 positive psychological qualities. School support has a certain predictive effect on each positive psychological quality, and the other three dimensions of social support have predictive effect on different positive psychological quality (Shen, You, & Man, 2019). Again, using a questionnaire, but from a much larger sample, 6503 participants, found that family economic income has a weak influence on the formation of students' positive psychological quality; And whether they come from single parent families, whether they are single children, and different adopters have significant effects on different psychological qualities. In general, "kindness", "social ability" and "sense of responsibility" are the psychological qualities that parents generally

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pay more attention to, but students' development status is not good; "Sense of mission", "humour" and "the ability to love and be loved" are not the qualities that parents pay most attention to, but the psychological qualities that students develop well; "Kindness", "cooperation" and "sense of responsibility" are the positive psychological qualities that primary and secondary school teachers generally attach importance to, but students' development status is not good. The study also confirmed that the positive psychological quality education strategy of positive reinforcement is the most effective (Li, Ying, Yang, & Jiang, 2022). As can be seen from above, although China's positive psychology research has gone through five stages, with rich content and a wide range of objects. However, in recent years, most of the positive psychology studies on children have studied their positive psychological qualities and related issues through questionnaires. Although there have been a lot of experimental studies in college students (Chen, 2019; Tang, 2018; Ye, 2023; Yin, 2021), there are relatively few PPIs studies in children.

3. PPIs in Chinese Children

A study takes “situation story interview” paradigm to investigate the essence of development of Chinese children positive thinking，that is to say the children's positive thinking is closely related to the theory of mind. The development characteristic of children's positive thinking is that children will first realize that even in the positive events，negative thinking can also bring poor emotional experiences and then gradually realize positive thinking can improve the poor emotional experience. Parents’ optimism and hope have effects on the development of children's positive thinking (Jiang & Tan, 2018). While the study did confirm that PPIs had a positive effect on children's positive thinking, the intervention design was somewhat monotonous and the quality of the target was not extensive, in stark contrast to studies on college students. Across the Strait, however, in Taiwan area, which is also part of the Chinese culture, PPIs in children group have been tried even earlier.

The work of Wang, Hong, and Tseng (2017) is one of typical example. They believe there are two widely used programs with good result for children and teenager: positive psychotherapy (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006) and well-being therapy (Ruini & Fava, 2012) Positive psychotherapy was performed in groups with six positive mental exercises for 1.5 hours each time for eight weeks according to individual needs. When applied to children, in addition to the six exercises of assessing and using strengths, three good things, writing their own autobiography, gratitude visits, savouring life, and giving positive and constructive responses to others, they also added the use of personal biography and film characters to illustrate how they can use their strengths. Finally, instructor teach children ways to use their strengths and characteristics and encourage children to develop a viable plan to become a better person. The results of Rashid, Anjum and Lennox studies are also recognized (Rashid & Anjum, 2008). Happiness therapy is a short-term psychotherapy strategy, which is more structured and instructive. This model was developed by Fava and his peers based on Ryff's conceptual model of psychological well-being to help individuals achieve balanced development among the six dimensions of well-being: autonomy, personal growth, environmental control, life purpose, positive relationships, and self-acceptance (Fava & Giovanni, 1999). Happiness therapy consists of three sessions: identifying happiness fragments, identifying irrational thoughts that interrupt moments of happiness, cognitive reconstruction and the pursuit of happiness, which are typically performed eight to 12 times a week or once every other week for 30 to 50 minutes. The main purpose of both programs is to help students focus on the positive events in their lives, as well as their own characteristics and strengths, to help them enhance their optimistic beliefs and happiness, and to prevent the occurrence of depression.

In order to enhance the positive emotions of economically disadvantaged students, Wang et al. (2017), based on the timeline of the past, present and future, which correspond to three dimensions of gratitude, continued joy (cultivating self-advantage), and optimism (changing perspective) proposed by Seligman (2002), planned to "Cherish what you have, express gratitude", "Identify your own advantages" and "establish an optimistic interpretation style" are the three main axes, combining the physical and mental characteristics of primary school children, and designing a program suitable for children breed in Chinese culture. This program follows three main axes in turn, drawing on the 24 trait strengths of Peterson, Park, and Seligman (2005), the happiness therapy courses of Ruini and Fava (2012) and Tomba et al. (2010), and the gratitude programs of Otake, Shimai, Tanaka-Matsumi, Otsui, and Fredrickson (2006) and Tseng (2006). Make children pay attention to their own self-advantages, so as to improve their self-confidence, distinguish the relationship between ideas, emotions and behaviors, so that irrational thoughts are broken, and produce

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positive and optimistic thoughts, and let children care about their families and write gratitude letters, increase positive family interaction.

Another experimental research takes placed in eastern China, demonstrated that four positive psychological qualities of love, friendly, Prudent and leadership have improved significantly after intervention. This positive psychological training program is divided into three stages: basic course, advantage course and concrete positive psychological quality course. The basic course mainly aims to introduce the positive psychology course, make students clear about the goal of the intervention, stimulate their internal motivation, and guide pupils' positive emotions into the curriculum through videos, short stories and other classroom forms, laying the foundation for the main part of the positive psychological quality training course; The advantage training course is mainly about the identification and application of advantage as well as the transformation and cultivation of advantage. The specific positive psychological quality training course selects four positive psychological qualities related to mental health and more operable: love, friendliness, creativity and gratitude. Activities include: emotional guidance, definition, group discussion, practical exercises and strength recording (Qin, 2022).

From the above studies on PPIs on both sides of the strait, it can be found that the implementation program of PPIs in Taiwan area was designed according to the characteristics of children in Chinese culture, but no experimental study was conducted, so we have no way to know whether this program can be effective. Although the study in mainland China adopted the method of experimental design, only some quality differences were significant, which need to be verified. Therefore, our study plans to integrate the results of the above two studies, adopt Wang's program to carry out PPIs, and use the simplified experimental design of the study in East China to try to find the effect of PPIs in community children.

4. Method

4.1. Research Design

This study was carried out using the standard pretest-posttest experimental design, and the same scale was used for the pretest-posttest and pretest-posttest children who all passed 12 courses. In order to reduce the interference before and after the same scale, the project was carried out once a week for a total of 3 months.

4.2. PPIs Program

Due to the obvious cultural nature of PPIs (Carr et al., 2021), only programs that have been carried out in the Chinese cultural circle are considered in this selection. It can be seen from the above literature review that although the experimental research in East China has achieved some results, the qualities significantly is not much. It may be more appropriate to choose the program designed by Wang in Taiwan area to try.

4.3. Scale

We selected Positive Mental Characters Scale of Chinese Primary School Students as our tool for measurement. On the basis of focusing on the VIA-Youth version of the scale, the draft was formed by referring to domestic and foreign excellent relevant tests and self-compiled questions. 5600 primary school students in grade 3, 4, 5 and 6 in Shandong, Beijing, Hebei, Guangdong, Heilongjiang, Henan, Gansu, Sichuan, Shaanxi, Guangxi and other regions were selected proportionally for scale testing. At the same time, the characteristics of the proportion of urban and rural school-age population in each region are considered, and the demographic variables such as parental occupation, student gender and age are randomized. The final scale consists of six dimensions, 13 positive psychological qualities and 50 items. The Cronbach 'α consistency coefficient of the scale was 0.88 (Meng, Zhang, & Wagner, 2014). The scale is widely used in children group in recent years (Li et al., 2022; Qin, 2022; Shen et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2017).

4.4. Subject Recruitment

Our team has long-term cooperation with Huxing Community Neighborhood Committee of Huxi Street, High-tech District, Chongqing. The experiment was supported by the neighborhood committee, which helped us to provide the site and recruit children from the community as experiment subjects.

5. Result

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5.1. Demographic Information of Subjects

We recruited a total of 20 subjects, 11 of which were retained to participate in the whole process and complete the pre-test and post-test, including 4 boys and 7 girls, 4, 3, 2 and 2 from grade 1, grade 2, grade 3 and grade 4 respectively, and 3 from single parent families and 8 from non-single parent families (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic information.

Variable	Items	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Boy	4	36.40%
	Girl	7	63.60%
Grade	1	4	36.40%
	2	3	27.30%
	3	2	18.20%
	4	2	18.20%
Single parent families	No	8	72.70%
	Yes	3	27.30%

5.2. The Difference of Positive Psychological Quality in Different Groups

Through the independent sample T test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) analysis, there was no statistics significant difference in positive psychological quality between the different groups of gender, grade and whether they came from single parent families.

5.3. The Difference of Positive Psychological Quality after PPIs

Through the paid-sample T-test on the total score of positive psychological quality, it can be seen that the mean of the pre-test score of positive psychological quality is 170.45 points, and the mean of the post-test is 187.36 points, which is nearly 17 points higher. $t=-2.555$, $p<0.05$. demonstrate significant differences were found between pre - and post-test. It shows that the positive psychological quality of children has been greatly improved after the PPIs. (Table 2).

Table 2. The difference of positive psychological quality.

Variable	M (Before/After)	t	Sig.
Positive psychological quality	170.45/187.36	-2.555	0.029

5.4. The Difference of Each Dimension after PPIs

Through the paired sample T-test for each sub-scale of positive psychological quality, it can be seen that the average post-test score of each sub-scale is greater than the pre-test score, indicating that after PPIs, the scores of each sub-scale of children's positive psychological quality have improved. Among them, discipline ($T=-2.540$, $P < 0.01$), sociability ($T=-3.022$, $p < 0.05$), transcend ($T=-2.961$, $p < 0.05$) are significantly different. Therefore, we believed that after children PPIs, their discipline, sociability and transcend are statistically significantly improved compared with before (Table 3).

Table 3. The difference of each dimension.

Variable	M±SD	M±SD	t
Cognition	22.45±3.83	24.00±4.67	-1.072
Emotion	27.72±4.94	29.18±3.878	-0.808
Volition	24.82±2.96	25.64±4.39	-0.906
Discipline	35.27±5.88	39.91±5.54	-2.540*
Sociability	26.82±5.46	29.64±4.41	-3.022*
Transcend	33.36±6.90	39.00±6.02	-2.961*

Note: * $p< 0.05$. M (Mean); SD (Standard deviation).

5.5. The Difference of Each Quality

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The mean values of each quality are improved in the post-test, but only the Prudent, modesty, leadership, gratitude and ideal have statistically significant differences After paired sample T test (Table 4).

Table 4. The Difference of each quality.

Variable	M±SD	M±SD	t
Creativity	13.45±2.16	13.73±3.63	-0.268
Curiosity	9.00±2.19	10.27±2.10	-1.641
Love	19.27±4.58	19.91±3.30	-0.527
Friendly	8.45±2.38	9.27±2.87	-0.820
Persistence	14.45±2.11	14.55±3.39	-0.131
Empressement	10.36±1.43	11.09±1.92	-1.203
Prudent	13.91±4.18	16.36±3.01	-2.565*
Lenient	11.55±2.02	12.18±2.23	-2.047
Modesty	9.82±1.67	11.36±1.69	-2.366*
Cooperation	16.91±2.70	18.27±2.15	-1.657
Leadership	9.91±3.21	11.36±3.20	-2.991*
Gratitude and Ideal	20.91±3.81	23.73±2.41	-2.385*
Wit and Humor	12.45±3.62	15.27±3.88	-0.268

Note: * p＜0.05. M (Mean); SD (Standard deviation).

6. Conclusion and Discussion

First, there is no difference in the positive psychological quality of children in the community in terms of gender, grade and whether they come from single-parent families. The result that there is no difference in positive psychological quality between male and female children has also been formalized in previous studies in East China (Qin, 2022). Therefore, different from college students and other groups, PPIs in children does not need to be carried out according to gender. As to grade, or age, and single parents' family or not, there is no statistic significant difference in our studies. In contrast, previous study shows that students from single-parent families scored lower on positive psychological qualities such as "ability to love and be loved", "sense of mission", "humility", "courage", "integrity", "humour", "fairness", "passion", "faith", "tolerance" and "leadership" than students from other families. However, their scores in the three positive psychological qualities of "kindness", "courage" and "humility" were higher than those of other students (Li et al., 2022). However, they did not make inferential analysis, only by comparing scores, so statistically, it is questionable. Moreover, our study is an experimental study, in order to ensure the feasibility of the experiment, it does not recruit a large number of subjects like survey research, so the sample is insufficient, and it cannot be completely confirmed that grade and single-parent families really have no difference in positive psychological quality. Therefore, it is necessary to further investigate and study large samples, and do a good job of inferential statistics.

Second, after PPIs the positive psychology quality of community children improved. As in the East China study, although children's positive psychological qualities improved overall after PPIs, only some of the qualities were statistically significant (Qin, 2022). Different from the studies in East China, which showed significant differences in love, friendly, Prudent and leadership, our research shows that Prudent, modesty, leadership, gratitude and ideal have significant differences. This comparison shows that Prudent and leadership are indeed the qualities most easily improved by PPIs in Chinese children. In addition, the positive psychological qualities affected by different PPIs do differ. East China's program is more effective for love and friendly, while the program of Taiwan area is more effective for modesty, gratitude and ideal. But the differences could also be due to geography. As the development of eastern and western China is slightly different, the school and family education that children receive will also be slightly different. This difference is likely to affect how children respond to PPIs.

In conclusion, through our study, we found that PPIs did have a significant effect on the cultivation of children's positive psychological qualities, and this effect was also confirmed in the Chinese western region of the community children. Moreover, this effect is not affected by demographic factors such as gender, and can be carried out on a large scale. However, we also need to note that different programs have different influences on different qualities of positive psychology. Therefore, when carrying out PPIs for children in the

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future, it is necessary to measure the positive psychological qualities of objects previously and select PPIs programs in a targeted way.

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