Proceedings of ICILLP 2025 Symposium: Psychological Perspectives on Teacher-Student Relationships in Educational Contexts
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.NS27001

The Influence of Internet-Disseminated "Sang Culture" on Adolescent Depression

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Abstract. The rapid proliferation of internet and social media platforms has significantly expanded the dissemination and influence of youth subcultures, facilitating adolescents' engagement with diverse digital environments. Among these, "Sang culture"—a social phenomenon characterized by pervasive negativity, self-deprecatory behavior, and decadence—has emerged as a prominent subtype, often expressed through humor and irony as mechanisms of affect regulation. Although serving as a psychological defense strategy, the intrinsically pessimistic orientation of Sang culture has the potential to exacerbate depressive symptomatology among adolescents. This research applies the 4P model to elucidate the pathways through which Sang culture impacts adolescent depression. Empirical evidence suggests that adolescents, in a crucial but psychologically immature developmental stage, are particularly vulnerable to distorted self-concept and learned helplessness resulting from sustained exposure to negative diagnostic content within Sang culture. Contributing factors include deficits in family communication, insufficient mental health literacy within educational institutions, and algorithmic amplification of negative online content—all of which intensify its adverse effects. While Sang culture possesses inherently maladaptive features, its elements of social critique and collective identity offer avenues for constructive transformation. Multifactorial intervention strategies—including familial psychosocial support, school-based mental health promotion, and regulatory oversight of online content—can attenuate its detrimental effects and support positive identity development. This study aims to inform parents, educators, and mental health professionals about the associated risks, proposing targeted interventions such as enhancement of emotional support mechanisms, expansion of psychological education, reinforcement of internet content regulation, and development of adaptive coping skills to bolster adolescent mental health resilience.

Keywords: adolescents, Sang culture, internet, depression, 4P model

1. Introduction

The rapid advancement of internet infrastructure and social media platforms has markedly expedited the dissemination of subcultural phenomena, thereby exerting extensive influence on adolescent populations. Sang culture, a prevalent subcultural manifestation among contemporary youth, is characterized by expressions of negativity, self-deprecation, and decadence, often conveyed through

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humor or irony as a means of articulating resignation in response to societal pressures, competitive environments, and future uncertainties. This phenomenon predominantly functions as an emotional regulation strategy and a psychological defense mechanism rather than an expression of genuine pessimism. During its proliferation, Sang culture frequently conflicts with conventional cultural values, leading adolescents to misinterpret it as mainstream culture. Such misperception can induce cognitive dissonance when exposed to conflicting cultural narratives, potentially precipitating rebellious behaviors and ideological conflicts with parental figures or educational authorities. Additionally, the pervasive themes within Sang culture—such as loneliness and escapism—may evoke strong emotional resonance with adolescents, thereby posing risks to mental health and increasing vulnerability to depressive disorders. Empirical studies have demonstrated a correlation between exposure to Sang culture and adverse psychological outcomes, including elevated anxiety levels [1]. Despite its increasing prominence, societal comprehension of Sang culture's psychological and social implications remains limited. Employing the 4P model (predisposing, precipitating, perpetuating, and protective factors), this analysis elucidates the pathways through which internet-mediated Sang culture influences adolescent depressive tendencies and recommends targeted intervention strategies to promote healthy psychological development.

2. Prevalence and incidence metrics

Depressive disorders are notably prevalent within adolescent cohorts, with prevalence rates reaching their apex between the ages of 18 and 24 years [2]. Clinical presentation in adolescents diagnosed with depressive disorders commonly encompasses persistent anhedonia or dysphoria, sleep-wake cycle dysregulation, comorbid substance use disorders, and engagement in non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI) behaviors [3]. These symptomatologies can substantially disrupt academic attainment, social integration, and neurocognitive development. Despite the implementation of evidence-based therapeutic interventions, remission rates post-treatment remain below 70% [4]. Epidemiological evidence indicates that approximately 14.8% of adolescents exhibit some level of depression risk, with 4.0% classified as at severe risk and 10.8% as at mild risk [2]. The incidence rate of first-onset depression during adolescence currently exceeds 40%. Over the past two decades, China has experienced a significant escalation in the prevalence of depressive disorders among adolescents, accompanied by a notable shift towards younger age cohorts, thereby presenting considerable challenges to the development of adolescent mental health systems [2].

3. Mechanisms of interaction between adolescent psychosocial development and subcultural identity formation

3.1. Psychosocial and cognitive attributes of adolescents

Adolescence constitutes a pivotal developmental period marked by sophisticated psychological processes influenced by multifaceted environmental factors, including socio-cultural pressures, academic competitiveness, and familial relationships. During this phase, individuals undergo progressive refinement of self-concept, characterized by an increased differentiation of self from others and active engagement in identity formation and personality development.

This elevated self-awareness manifests as heightened sensitivity to physical appearance, perceived competencies, personal interests, and social standing. Adolescents often exhibit polarized self-perception patterns, fluctuating between states of inferiority and overconfidence. A salient phenomenon during this period is "role confusion," wherein individuals experiment with provisional

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identities—such as cosplaying or competing in electronic sports—to facilitate the integration of evolving self-concepts. These cognitive and identity processes underpin engagement with specific subcultural groups, wherein shared activities serve primary functions in reinforcing personal and social identity constructs.

3.2. Characteristics of sang culture

The propagation of mourning culture predominantly circumvents traditional centralized media channels—such as mainstream broadcast outlets and national communication infrastructures—and instead leverages marginalized socio-cultural groups and informal communication networks. These entities employ digital social networks, independent media outlets, and alternative platforms, adopting a decentralized dissemination model to facilitate rapid proliferation of youth-oriented subcultural practices. Mourning culture typically manifests within specific affinity groups or communities characterized by pronounced shared identities and a heightened sense of collective belonging. Through engagement in subcultural and mourning practices, participants concurrently utilize these avenues for self-expression and as mechanisms for attaining identity validation. The subversive and critical elements embedded within these cultures often sharply diverge from dominant cultural paradigms [5]. Mourning culture actively opposes irrational social phenomena through negative expressions, systematically interrogating and contesting prevailing social norms, moral codes, and value systems. Its inherently rebellious ethos allows it to transcend conventional social structures during dissemination, thereby facilitating the emergence of novel cultural identities and value orientations. Phenomenologically, mourning culture adopts an exterior presentation marked by negativity, decadence, and self-mockery—serving as an externalization of feelings of powerlessness and as a form of adaptation to societal pressures, intense competition, and future uncertainties. This is conveyed through humor, irony, or sardonic banter. The phenomenon often termed "melancholy culture" transcends mere pessimism and existential fatigue; it functions as emotional catharsis and a psychological defense mechanism, representing a distinct mode through which youth navigate high-pressure environments to seek self-identity and collective resonance.

3.3. Interaction and influence of subcultural traits on adolescent mental health

The characteristics inherent in youth subcultures exert a dual modulatory effect on adolescent psychological well-being. Engagement in subcultural groups can facilitate the development of personal identity and provide emotional reinforcement, thereby serving as protective factors. Conversely, affiliation with such subcultures often diverges from mainstream societal norms, constituting a relatively marginal form of social identification that limits broader social acceptance and recognition. Empirical evidence indicates that diminished self-concept clarity correlates with decreased psychological resilience, impairing adolescents' capacity to manage external stressors effectively [6,7].

Furthermore, adolescents possess limited emotional regulation skills; thus, engagement with depressive subcultural narratives—which serve as outlets for negative emotional expression—may yield transient emotional catharsis but lack constructive coping mechanisms. Instead, such engagement may entrench maladaptive cognitive schemas, transforming episodic stressors into enduring depressive trajectories. Additionally, adolescents are particularly vulnerable to self-referential affirmation; persistent exposure to derogatory lexicalizations such as "good-for-nothing" or "lying flat" reinforces inferiority complexes. This repetitive negative labeling can distort self-

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perception, fostering a cognitive pattern characteristic of learned helplessness—a state where perceived lack of control perpetuates negative self-evaluations.

Without timely and effective psychological intervention, this process amplifies internalized stress, heightening susceptibility to mental health disorders, notably depression. At a cognitive-behavioral level, repetitive self-deprecating affirmations may induce automatic psychological suggestions, reinforcing maladaptive schemas associated with helplessness. This cognitive entrapment leads adolescents to generalize transient setbacks into pervasive failures, diminishing self-efficacy and increasing depressive symptoms.

Moreover, the commercialization and commodification of "depression culture"—presented as a fashion statement—may induce adolescents to misinterpret this subcultural affiliation as authentic self-expression. Such misinterpretation impedes recognition of underlying psychological vulnerabilities and hinders proactive engagement with adaptive coping strategies, thereby obstructing resilience development. Consequently, this dynamic can exacerbate existing mental health issues, including anxiety and depressive disorders, by discouraging constructive problem-solving and emotional regulation.

4. Analysis of the mechanisms underlying youth subculture and adolescent depressive disorders from the 4P model

4.1. Susceptibility factors

During this developmental stage, adolescents exhibit a relatively high capacity for cognitive shaping; however, their decision-making and judgment faculties remain underdeveloped, rendering them vulnerable to conflating mourning culture with mainstream societal norms and adopting such paradigms uncritically [7]. This period is characterized by ongoing psychological maturation, with immature cognitive schemas, emotional regulation mechanisms, and burgeoning self-identification processes. Consequently, pervasive negative self-referential cognitions, diminished motivation, and nihilistic narratives inherent in depressive subcultures resonate with adolescents' evolving psychological traits, potentially amplifying internal distress. The familial and educational milieus exert significant influence on adolescent mental health; deficiencies in familial communication, emotional support, and problem-solving resources can precipitate feelings of social isolation and hinder effective stress-coping strategies. Concurrently, inadequacies in school-based mental health programs or insufficient emphasis on adolescent psychological development constrain adolescents' emotional regulation capabilities amidst social and academic stressors. Furthermore, mourning culture exerts a potent appeal during this period, especially amid personal adversities, familial burdens, or emotional crises. Characteristics intrinsic to subcultural affiliations—such as a strong sense of group belonging, rebellious attitudes, and a desire for independence—may serve to reinforce identity formation processes, thereby increasing susceptibility to depressive symptomatology.

4.2. Inducing factors

Multidimensional stressors originating from familial, educational, and interpersonal domains frequently contribute to psychological distress and heightened stress levels in adolescents encountering multifaceted conflicts involving academic performance, peer interactions, and parental expectations. Inadequate amelioration of these stressors can serve as precipitating agents for emotional disturbances within this demographic [8]. Concurrently, the cultural phenomenon of

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"melancholy discourse" undermines the valence of perseverance and effort by promulgating a dismissive perspective, thereby facilitating the rationalization of escapism and diminishing adolescents' sense of responsibility and resilience in stress management. During group interactions, such dynamics often provoke empathic resonance with negative emotional states, leading to the amplification of individual feelings of social isolation and fostering a deleterious collective emotional climate.

4.3. Persistent factors

In adolescent populations diagnosed with depressive disorders, clinical presentations commonly include affective dysregulation and behavioral alterations. Nevertheless, caregivers and educators frequently overlook or underestimate these symptoms' clinical significance, erroneously assuming they constitute normative affective variations or personality traits associated with pubertal development. Some parental interpretations dismiss maladaptive behaviors as typical developmental phenomena [9]. Concurrently, familial and educational institutions, which serve as primary environmental contexts, often underperform in intervention during critical periods. For example, during school bullying episodes, educators frequently fail to execute prompt intervention or mitigation strategies, while parental figures exhibit a tendency toward reactive attribution, such as characterizing affected adolescents as lacking resilience. Furthermore, when adolescents engage in non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI), parental responses may include maladaptive, extreme remarks [9], which serve to exacerbate underlying stressors and potentially reinforce suicidal ideation. In the digital domain, platform oversight mechanisms are insufficient, with inadequate monitoring of user-generated content; consequently, recommendation algorithms perpetually promote distressing material, thereby subjecting adolescents to continuous exposure to negative emotional stimuli under substantial psychological strain.

4.4. Protective factors

Certain adolescents demonstrate pronounced traits of cheerfulness and optimism. Upon exposure to adverse cultural environments, these individuals typically possess pre-existing social-cognitive competencies and robust psychological adjustment mechanisms. Enhanced psychological resilience facilitates rapid detection and efficient self-regulation of negative stimuli and emotional states [10]. Effective familial communication frameworks enable adolescents to articulate personal circumstances and needs promptly, thereby alleviating psychological stress. Furthermore, school-based mental health education enhances adolescents' awareness of their affective fluctuations and bolsters emotional regulation skills. Concurrently, as primary vectors for youth subcultural dissemination, stringent screening and oversight of online content can mitigate exposure to negative influences and prevent adverse guidance.

The analysis underscores that the etiology of adolescent depressive disorders is a multifactorial and dynamic process. Consequently, bolstering protective factors, mitigating risk-inducing influences, and implementing targeted intervention strategies are critical components of comprehensive prevention and treatment protocols for adolescent depression.

5. Countermeasures, recommendations, and intervention strategies

Based on the aforementioned mechanistic analysis, this report delineates feasible intervention methodologies and corresponding strategic responses.

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5.1. Enhancement of depressive disorders in adolescents through sociopsychological and familial interventions

The familial unit functions as the primary locus for intervention. Caregivers should employ empirically supported parenting paradigms, such as authoritative parenting models, to foster secure attachment bonds and mitigate excessive control or emotional neglect [11]. Regular familial meetings are recommended to facilitate bidirectional communication and to promote engagement in mental health literacy, enabling early detection of depressive symptomatology.

At the educational and societal levels, the establishment of a "collaborative triad" comprising familial, scholastic, and healthcare entities is imperative. Such mechanisms should facilitate seamless information exchange between school-based psychological services and families, establish parent peer-support groups, and incorporate emotional regulation training to bolster resilience.

At the broader social domain, digital platforms should be optimized to promote standardized “youth-friendly” interfaces, thereby curbing adolescents’ exposure to harmful information and negative emotional stimuli. Platform operators must enforce stringent supervision over content to suppress online hostility and inappropriate material, fostering a healthier virtual environment. Additionally, community youth centers should implement non-pharmacological interventions, including mindfulness-based stress reduction and art therapy programs, aimed at bolstering adolescents' mental well-being. Governmental agencies should augment mental health service infrastructure by deploying full-time psychologists within primary healthcare settings, establishing 24-hour psychological crisis hotlines, and combating mental health stigmatization through targeted media campaigns.

5.2. Enhancement of adolescents’ personal resilience to depressive disorders

Adolescents should proactively cultivate diverse interests and hobbies to broaden cognitive perspectives and reinforce adaptive value systems, thereby serving as protective factors against deleterious online content. Routine adherence, emphasizing consistent sleep hygiene, is essential; empirical evidence indicates that sufficient restorative sleep exerts a beneficial impact on adolescents’ psychological and physiological health [12].

Furthermore, mental health literacy should be emphasized—adolescents need to acquire knowledge regarding psychiatric conditions such as depression and anxiety, enabling early recognition of pertinent symptoms. Timely implementation of scientifically validated interventions, including cognitive-behavioral therapy, can facilitate the modification of maladaptive cognitions and emotional responses, thereby enhancing emotional regulation and behavioral outcomes [13].

6. Conclusion

The "mourning culture," characterized by self-deprecating tendencies, counter-hegemonic values, and resilience in adversity—emblematic features of online youth subculture—exhibits a statistically significant correlation with adolescent depressive symptomatology. This relationship operates through three primary mechanisms: (1) distortion of adolescents' perception of reality, leading to cognitive biases; (2) attenuation of psychological resilience and stress-coping capacities; and (3) formation of an insular information environment mediated by social media algorithmic filtering. Empirical evidence indicates that chronic exposure to such content can precipitate identity crises and entrench transient emotional disturbances into enduring psychological disorders.

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Furthermore, research delineates effective multi-tiered intervention strategies. A layered protection framework—comprising familial support systems, educational interventions, and social regulatory measures—demonstrates substantial efficacy in mitigating the adverse effects of mourning culture. Parental emotional support functions as a psychological buffer, school-based mental health curricula foster rational cognition, and social media governance reduces the proliferation of deleterious content. This comprehensive, multi-dimensional intervention yields synergistic benefits.

However, it is imperative to recognize that mourning culture also encompasses constructive elements. Its underlying critical consciousness and collective identity possess developmental potential when appropriately harnessed. Through targeted professional guidance, the cognitive resources embedded within this cultural expression can be redirected to promote psychological growth, enabling adolescents to affirm reality while adopting adaptive, constructive outlooks.

Practically, strategic emphasis should be placed on establishing an integrated support system involving familial communication enhancement, institutionalized media literacy education, and the implementation of content management policies on digital platforms. The overarching objective is to facilitate a transition in youth engagement from "negative identification" to "active participation," fostering a comprehensive understanding of life realities and nurturing resilient, positive attitudes toward existence.

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