

Predicament and Breakthrough: A Study on Social Work Intervention in the Current Situation of Postgraduates Trapped in "Disordered Life and Stagnant Research"

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Abstract

As the top segment of the higher education system, postgraduate education serves as the core carrier for cultivating high-level professional and innovative talents, undertaking the vital mission of providing high-quality intellectual resources for social development. With the continuous expansion of postgraduate enrollment in China, various contradictions in the training process have gradually emerged, among which the dual predicament of "disordered life and stagnant research" faced by some postgraduates has become a typical issue. In life, they are trapped by academic pressure, time imbalance and social isolation, losing the autonomous rhythm of life and the sense of emotional gain; in research, they are restricted by confusion in topic selection, insufficient motivation and lack of resources, falling into a vicious circle of research internal friction and hindered achievement output. Based on the core concept of "helping people to help themselves" in social work, with ecological system theory and social support theory as the theoretical framework, and combined with the actual situation of postgraduate training in universities, this paper analyzes the specific manifestations and formation mechanism of postgraduates' dual predicament of "life and research" through literature review and semi-structured interviews. It further explores the paths and practical strategies of professional social work intervention from the micro individual, meso campus and macro social levels, aiming to provide practical references for alleviating the development predicament of postgraduates, optimizing the postgraduate training system in universities and improving the quality of postgraduate training, so as to help postgraduates realize the coordinated development of academic research and daily life.

Keywords

Postgraduates; Disordered Life; Stagnant Research; Social Work Intervention; Social Support System; University Education.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

With China's higher education entering a new stage of popularization, the strategic position of postgraduate education has become increasingly prominent, and the enrollment scale has maintained

With China's higher education entering a new stage of popularization, the strategic position of postgraduate education has become increasingly prominent, and the enrollment scale has maintained steady growth. As a special group with both student identity and "quasi-social person" identity, postgraduates are required not only to complete high-intensity academic tasks but also to improve their social adaptation, lifestyle and psychological adjustment ability.

However, under the combined influence of the university's training orientation of "valuing scientific research over education", academic involution, uncertain employment expectations and a single evaluation system, more and more postgraduates have fallen into the dual predicament of "disordered life and stagnant research". They are occupied by busy scientific research trivialities every day, but struggle to find clear research directions; their personal living space is severely squeezed, lacking effective social interaction and emotional catharsis. Eventually, a vicious circle is formed where "frustrated research leads to life anxiety, and disordered life exacerbates research difficulties".

As a discipline aiming at solving social problems and promoting the all-round development of human beings, social work, with its core concept of "helping people to help themselves", diverse professional methods and systematic intervention perspective, is highly consistent with the demand for alleviating postgraduates' dual dilemmas^[3]. Based on this, this paper takes the realistic predicament of university postgraduates as the research object and explores feasible paths of professional social work intervention.

1.2. Research Significance

1.2.1. Theoretical Significance

On the one hand, this paper combines classic social work theories with specific postgraduate training scenarios, enriching the application scenarios of social work theories in higher education¹. On the other hand, it focuses on the interactive relationship between postgraduates' disordered life and stagnant research, making up for gaps in current research and providing a new perspective for related studies^[7].

1.2.2. Practical Significance

At the individual level, the intervention strategies can help postgraduates adjust their living and research state and build a sound social support network⁵. At the university level, the research can provide references for improving the postgraduate training system and establishing a comprehensive education mechanism of "scientific research training + life care". At the social level, it helps improve the quality of high-level talent training and provides intellectual support for social development.

1.3. Research Status at Home and Abroad

1.3.1. Foreign Research Status

Foreign research on postgraduate development problems is relatively systematic, focusing on training mode, tutor guidance, resource allocation and mental health⁸. School social work has been widely applied in higher education, forming a mature model to solve students' academic, life and psychological problems, which provides practical reference for this study^[9].

1.3.2. Domestic Research Status

Domestic studies mostly focus on single dimensions such as research ability, employment pressure and psychological anxiety^[2]. Few studies combine disordered life with stagnant research to analyze their interactive relationship, and research on social work intervention is still in the exploratory stage, which is the starting point of this paper.

1.4. Research Methods and Framework

1.4.1. Research Methods

This paper mainly adopts two research methods: literature research and semi-structured interview.

First, literature research method. Through CNKI, Wanfang, VIP, Web of Science and other academic databases, this paper collects and sorts out relevant research results at home and abroad. The literature mainly covers postgraduate academic pressure, mental health status,

social support system, school social work practice, ecological system theory and social support theory. By reading, classifying and summarizing the literature, this paper clarifies the research focus and theoretical basis, grasps the research trends and deficiencies in related fields, and lays a solid theoretical foundation for the analysis of postgraduates' dual predicament and the construction of social work intervention paths.

Second, semi-structured interview method. In order to obtain real and in-depth first-hand data, this paper selects 15 postgraduates from different grades and disciplines as interview objects, including master students and doctoral students. The interview contents mainly include daily living conditions, scientific research progress, pressure sources, emotional experience, social support status and service needs. Each interview lasts about 30 to 50 minutes. All interviews are recorded with consent and sorted out into text materials. Through thematic analysis of the interview data, this paper summarizes the concrete manifestations and internal logic of postgraduates' disordered life and stagnant research, which provides strong practical support for the research.

1.4.2. Research Framework

The whole paper is divided into six parts.

The first part is the introduction, which mainly expounds the research background, theoretical and practical significance, domestic and foreign research status, research methods and research framework.

The second part defines the core concepts such as disordered life, stagnant research and school social work, and systematically combs the ecological system theory and social support theory, so as to clarify the theoretical basis and analytical perspective of this paper.

The third part, based on the interview data, describes the specific manifestations of postgraduates' dual predicament from two dimensions: disordered life and stagnant research, and analyzes the interactive vicious circle between them.

The fourth part, guided by the ecological system theory, analyzes the formation mechanism of the dual predicament from three levels: micro individual, meso campus and macro society.

The fifth part focuses on the realistic demands of postgraduates, and constructs a multi-level social work intervention path from micro, meso and macro levels by using case work, group work and community work.

The sixth part is the conclusion and prospect, which summarizes the main conclusions of this paper, points out the existing deficiencies, and prospects the future development direction of school social work in postgraduate education service.

2. Definition of Relevant Concepts and Theoretical Foundation

2.1. Definition of Relevant Concepts

2.1.1. Postgraduate Disordered Life

Disordered life refers to an unbalanced, passive and uncontrolled living state of postgraduates under the influence of academic pressure, scientific research anxiety, time management disorder and emotional distress. It is mainly manifested in irregular work and rest, unhealthy diet, lack of physical exercise, narrow social interaction, insufficient emotional expression and low sense of life gain. In this state, postgraduates' life rhythm is completely dominated by scientific research tasks, and they gradually lose their autonomy and happiness in life, which further affects their physical and mental health and academic state.

2.1.2. Postgraduate Stagnant Research

Stagnant research refers to a low-efficiency, low-motivation and low-output state in the process of postgraduate academic research. It is not a complete suspension of research, but a long-term

dilemma of ineffective internal friction, including unclear topic selection, insufficient research methods, slow progress, lack of innovation, resistance to research tasks and difficulty in achievement output. Postgraduates in this state often appear “superficial busy” and “pseudo efforts”, which seriously restricts their academic growth and sustainable development.

2.1.3. School Social Work

School social work is a professional service activity that applies social work concepts, theories and methods to the field of school education. It takes students as the main service objects, and helps students solve problems in study, life, interpersonal communication and psychological development through professional methods such as case work, group work and community work. At the same time, school social work also promotes the coordinated development of individuals, families, schools and society, improves the campus support system, and creates a more supportive growth environment for students^[3].

2.2. Theoretical Foundation

2.2.1. Ecological System Theory

Ecological system theory was put forward by Bronfenbrenner. It holds that individual development is embedded in multi-level interactive systems, including micro system, meso system, exo system and macro system. Individual behavior and development status are not only affected by individual factors, but also restricted by the interaction of various environmental systems^[1].

Applied to this study, the micro system includes postgraduates' individual ability, psychological quality, family support and peer relationship; the meso system mainly involves university training system, tutor guidance, campus culture and service mechanism; the exo system includes mass media, social organizations and related institutions; the macro system covers national education policies, social employment environment and talent evaluation orientation. The formation of postgraduates' dual predicament is the result of the imbalance and poor interaction of the above systems, which provides a systematic analytical framework for this paper^[7].

2.2.2. Social Support Theory

Social support theory emphasizes that individuals can obtain material, emotional, informational and companionship support from social networks such as families, friends, schools and organizations. A sound and stable social support network is conducive to helping individuals resist pressure, alleviate anxiety, improve problem-solving ability and adaptability^[2].

For postgraduates, social support includes formal support provided by schools, tutors and psychological centers, and informal support from families, classmates and friends. The lack or weakness of social support is one of the important reasons for postgraduates to fall into life disorder and research anxiety. Specific Manifestations of Postgraduates' "Disordered Life and Stagnant Research"

2.3. Disordered Life: Passivity, Imbalance and Low Sense of Gain

2.3.1. Irregular Work and Rest and Physical and Mental Sub-health

A large number of postgraduates have the problems of staying up late, irregular diet and lack of exercise for a long time due to scientific research tasks. Over time, physical problems such as insomnia, fatigue, cervical vertebra discomfort and decreased immunity follow. At the same time, negative emotions such as anxiety, irritability and low mood are difficult to relieve, forming a sub-health state of both physical and mental imbalance.

2.3.2. Social Isolation and Lack of Emotional Support

The individualized and intensive characteristics of postgraduate scientific research make many people form a fixed track of dormitory, laboratory and canteen. Social circles are narrow, group activities are scarce, and emotional communication is insufficient. When facing pressure and confusion, they lack effective channels for catharsis and support, and are prone to loneliness, depression and self-isolation.

2.3.3. Serious Time Imbalance and Loss of Life Autonomy

Scientific research time constantly squeezes life time. Many postgraduates give up rest, entertainment, sports and social interaction for projects and papers. They have no personal life space and cannot arrange their time independently. Over time, they lose their sense of control over life and fall into passive and empty living conditions^[6].

2.3.4. Cognitive Deviation and Low Self-Identity

Some postgraduates take scientific research achievements as the only standard to measure their own value. Once the research is blocked, they will have strong self-denial and inferiority. This single and extreme cognitive model makes it difficult for them to obtain a sense of accomplishment and happiness from daily life, and further deepens the sense of anxiety and powerlessness^[5].

2.4. Stagnant Research: Low Efficiency, Internal Friction and Difficult Growth

2.4.1. Confusion in Topic Selection and Unclear Research Direction

At the initial stage of research, many postgraduates are unable to find appropriate research points. They are troubled by problems such as too broad direction, insufficient innovation and difficulty in data collection. Coupled with insufficient targeted guidance from tutors, they are in a state of hesitation and delay for a long time, which makes it difficult to start research smoothly.

2.4.2. Lack of Scientific Research Methods and Low Efficiency

Postgraduate research requires high independent research ability, including literature analysis, logical construction, data processing and paper writing. However, some postgraduates lack systematic training in research methods, resulting in low efficiency, repeated detours and ineffective efforts. Although they spend a lot of time, they cannot form stable research output^[3].

2.4.3. Insufficient Motivation and Negative Resistance

Long-term research stagnation and high pressure will gradually wear down initial enthusiasm. Some postgraduates begin to show procrastination, escape and resistance. They lack internal motivation and can only passively cope with research tasks, forming a vicious circle of "no progress, more anxiety, more difficult to move forward".

3. Formation Mechanism of Postgraduates' Dual Predicament

3.1. Micro Individual Level: Insufficient Ability and Cognitive Bias

3.1.1. Lack of Core Competencies

Postgraduate stage requires strong independent learning ability, time management ability and scientific research ability. However, some postgraduates lack systematic training in the undergraduate stage, and it is difficult to adapt to the high-intensity and high-autonomy research model. They are not good at arranging time, lack research thinking and methods, and are easy to fall into chaos and anxiety when facing problems^[3].

3.1.2. Cognitive Deviation and Poor Psychological Adjustment

Many postgraduates have cognitive biases. They either overemphasize scientific research and ignore life, or take achievements as the only standard of self-worth. In addition, their

psychological resilience and emotional regulation ability are insufficient. When facing setbacks, they cannot adjust their mentality in time, and negative emotions continue to accumulate^[5].

3.2. Meso Campus Level: Imperfect System and Inadequate Support

3.2.1. Utilitarian Training System

At present, some universities have a relatively utilitarian orientation in postgraduate training, overemphasizing papers, projects and other achievement indicators, while ignoring the physical and mental health and comprehensive development of postgraduates. The curriculum is relatively single, lacking practical courses such as research methods and mental health. The evaluation system is not comprehensive enough, which aggravates the academic pressure and internal friction of postgraduates^[7].

3.2.2. Imperfect Tutor Guidance Mechanism

Tutor guidance is the key factor affecting postgraduate training quality. However, problems such as heavy tutor workload, insufficient guidance energy, uneven guidance ability and inconsistent research direction are common. The assessment of tutors also focuses more on scientific research output rather than the process and effect of student training, resulting in insufficient and inaccurate guidance for postgraduates.

3.3. Macro Social Level: Employment Pressure and Single Evaluation

3.3.1. Fierce Employment Competition and Uncertain Expectations

With the expansion of postgraduate enrollment, employment competition becomes increasingly fierce. Employers have higher and higher requirements for academic qualifications, achievements and abilities. In order to improve their competitiveness, postgraduates have to pursue paper output and project experience regardless of cost, which greatly aggravates scientific research pressure and life burden^[6].

3.3.2. Utilitarian Talent Evaluation Orientation

The current social talent evaluation still has a strong utilitarian color, overemphasizing academic qualifications, professional titles and scientific research achievements, while ignoring the individual's comprehensive quality, practical ability and growth process. Such social atmosphere brings invisible pressure to postgraduates, making them fall into the dual anxiety of research and life^[4].

4. Paths and Strategies of Social Work Intervention

4.1. Micro Individual Level: Case Work Intervention to Improve Individual Strength

4.1.1. Ability Improvement Service

Aiming at the problems of time management chaos and insufficient research ability, social workers carry out one-on-one case intervention. Through professional assessment and guidance, help postgraduates master scientific time allocation methods, formulate reasonable research and life plans, and improve learning efficiency. At the same time, connect resources to carry out research method guidance, enhance their independent research ability, and reduce academic anxiety^[3].

4.1.2. Cognitive Restructuring and Psychological Adjustment

Using cognitive behavioral theory, social workers help postgraduates correct extreme and single cognitive models, establish a balanced concept of "life and research coordinated development", and rebuild objective and positive self-cognition. Through listening, empathy and emotional catharsis, help them relieve anxiety, depression and other negative emotions, improve psychological resilience, and face pressure and setbacks with a healthier attitude^[5].

4.2. Meso Campus Level: Group Work and Community Work to Build a Support System

4.2.1. Carry out Thematic Group Work

Social workers carry out various group work activities according to the needs of postgraduates, such as research experience sharing groups, emotional pressure relief groups, time management groups and interpersonal communication groups. Through group interaction and mutual assistance, postgraduates can enhance communication, learn from each other's experience, relieve pressure, expand social circles, and establish a good peer support network^[9].

4.2.2. Promote the Optimization of Campus System and Services

Using community work methods, social workers actively connect with graduate schools, student offices, psychological centers and other departments, put forward feasible suggestions to promote the optimization of postgraduate training system and evaluation mechanism, strengthen tutor training and assessment, improve the allocation of scientific research resources, and improve the professional level of psychological counseling services, so as to build a more supportive campus environment^[8].

4.3. Macro Social Level: Policy Advocacy and Environmental Optimization

4.3.1. Promote the Improvement of Relevant Policies

Carry out policy advocacy to education, human resources and social security and other departments, suggest moderately weakening the single orientation of paper achievements in postgraduate evaluation, improving the employment service system, guiding employers to establish a more diversified talent evaluation standard, reducing the excessive pressure brought by employment competition and achievement orientation^[6].

4.3.2. Strengthen School-family-society Linkage

Strengthen communication and cooperation with postgraduates' families, guide parents to pay attention to their children's physical and mental health rather than just achievements, and build a warm family support system. At the same time, carry out social publicity, advocate the concept of respecting diversity and caring for physical and mental health, and create a more tolerant and supportive social atmosphere for postgraduates^[5].

5. Conclusions and Prospects

5.1. Research Conclusions

First, the dual predicament of "disordered life and stagnant research" has become a common problem faced by some postgraduates, with obvious characteristics of two-way internal friction and vicious circle.

Second, the formation of the predicament is not caused by a single factor, but the result of the joint action of micro individual ability and cognition, meso campus training system and support services, and macro social employment environment and talent evaluation.

Third, social work has unique professional advantages in alleviating postgraduates' dual predicament. Guided by ecological system theory and social support theory, a multi-level intervention system integrating micro case work, meso group work and community work, and macro policy advocacy and environmental optimization can effectively help postgraduates get out of the dilemma and realize the coordinated development of life and research.

5.2. Future Prospects

In the future, school social work should be more deeply integrated into the postgraduate education service system. It is necessary to further promote the multi-subject collaborative governance of universities, families, society and government, build a more comprehensive,

professional and sustainable support system, and help postgraduates grow healthily and develop in an all-round way^[8].

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