

Culturally Syntonic Crisis Intervention in China: A Retrospective Analysis of Psychological Hotline Data During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Background: Crisis hotlines provide vital support during public health emergencies, yet most intervention frameworks rely on Western assumptions, limiting their resonance in contexts shaped by Confucian, Daoist, and aesthetic traditions. This study examines mental health symptom trajectories across three COVID-19 pandemic phases and evaluates the immediate de-escalation effectiveness of a novel Cultural-Value-Psychology (CVP) framework mobilizing traditional Chinese cultural resources. **Methods:** We conducted a retrospective analysis of 2,899 call records from the Shenzhen Hope Hotline (2020–2022). Applying strict criteria, 2,795 valid calls were analyzed across the Initial (January–June 2020; $n=922$), Adaptation (December 2020–June 2021; $n=1,020$), and Recovery (December 2021–June 2022; $n=853$) phases. **Results:** Anxiety remained pervasively high across all phases ($57.5\% \rightarrow 50.0\% \rightarrow 53.9\%$; $p < 0.01$). Depressive symptoms exhibited significant phase-dependent variation, peaking sharply during the Adaptation phase ($9.2\% \rightarrow 19.6\% \rightarrow 12.3\%$; $p < 0.001$). Males ($OR=3.54$, 95% CI: 2.45–5.10) and adolescents aged 10–18 ($OR=2.46$, 95% CI: 1.53–3.95) demonstrated significantly elevated risk for suicidal ideation. Crucially, CVP-grounded modalities achieved exceptional immediate crisis de-escalation rates: Chinese Cultural Psychology (93.2%), Strategic Culture drawing on Daoist dialectics (95.7%), and Clarifying and Analyzing Action Techniques (CAT) anchoring Confucian family interconnectedness (100%, $n=16$ pilot). **Conclusion:** Mental health symptoms display distinct temporal trajectories during prolonged collective crises. Integrating culturally syntonic resources—such as Confucian family interconnectedness, Daoist naturalistic acceptance, and strategic coping derived from Chinese military philosophy—yields high immediate de-escalation effectiveness. These findings challenge the reliance on unadapted Western paradigms, advocating instead for the systematic incorporation of indigenous cultural logic into global public mental health protocols.

Keywords

COVID-19, Crisis Hotline, Cultural Psychiatry, Chinese Cultural Psychology, Suicidal Ideation, CVP Framework, CAT Technique, Art of War