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# Substantial Effect Research on Peer Mutual Aid Based on Perspective of Positive Psychology

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## To cite this article:

Li Tianwei, Zhang Tangsong, Wang Fei, Li Fuyuan. Substantial Effect Research on Peer Mutual Aid Based on Perspective of Positive Psychology. *Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*. Vol. 5, No. 5, 2016, pp. 124-130. doi: 10.11648/j.pbs.20160505.12

**Received:** September 10, 2016; **Accepted:** October 11, 2016; **Published:** October 20, 2016

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**Abstract:** Positive psychology and peer mutual aid is both on the basis of humanism and the common value essence of them are to help people to help themselves. Therefore, based on the perspective of positive psychology Peer Mutual Aid is representing the general trend of college mental health education. As an example of the peer mutual aid on adaptability, we have designed a comparative study method of an experimental group and a controlled group. We carried out 6 group counseling activities in the experimental group, in order to improve the adaptability to the experimental group, and the controlled group does not do any intervention. Two adaptability tests were carried out on the two classes before the intervention and after intervention. Then we find that the total score and the various dimensions of the experimental class were significantly improved ( $p < 0.001$ ) after the intervention. We also find that the total score and five factors were significantly improved in the experimental group ( $p < 0.05$ ) compared with the controlled group. So we can come to the conclusion that the ideas of peer mutual aid group activities have a significant effect on enhancing the adaptability based on positive psychology.

**Keywords:** College Students, Peer Mutual Aid, Positive Psychology, Adaptability, SAP

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## 1. Introduction

College students are the hope of the future of the nation, their growth and development not only affect the process of socialist modernization construction, but also be related to the sustainable development of our country and the comprehensive strength of participating in international competition. According to a survey for four years, about 20% of students will be accompanied by symptoms of the more obvious psychological problems, and about 50% of the students will have mild psychological problems or less obvious symptoms of anxiety, depression and other mental health problems. Another survey also showed that about 20.23% of college freshmen in China have varying degrees of psychological disorder. Due to a variety of mental illness, the number of students drop out of school accounted for the overall number of about 48%. Freshman, sophomore is the focus of the outbreak of psychological problems among all college students and there exists the most serious problems with the majority of them. With the adaptation of the school

environment, the third grade enter into the psychological stable period, Due to employment, postgraduate entrance examination and other pressure, a new round of psychological problems are likely to occur among the fourth grade. By reviewing the relevant reports, we found that university students may occur various psychological problems because they do not adapt to the college life, it mainly includes the following characteristics:

- On the change of the living environment, freshmen cannot adapt to the surrounding environment
- Because of the pressure of learning and competition, the psychological burden is too heavy, in the meanwhile, the college students have no friends to talk to, and they feel depressed
- Some of the college students with more introverted personality dare to communicate with the new students, because they feel timid in talking with strangers
- College students are full of longing for the future, but they also feel confused for the development of the future, resulting in confusion and anxiety
- Sometimes, college students will suffer emotional

frustration, they have no one to talk, and leading to the pain of the heart cannot be healed in time

- College students are rich in emotion, but it is not stable, which leads to great changes in psychological fluctuation

It is difficult to help so many students in the face of various psychological problems of college students from the school, only relying on the psychological counseling teachers and counselors.

We referred the information that schools in many states in the United States have set up Student Assistance Programs (SAPs for short) service, for different objects, the content is not the same. Some practice shows that the SAPs can solve some health problem behavior of students in the limited time, including stress, depression and reaction effects of academic life events. It is proved that this is a good way for students to carry out psychological therapy and behavior intervention. There are few reports on the research of SAP in China. Studies revealing that teachers as therapists (TAT) and students assistance program (SAP), both of which have strong referral function to the current psychological assistance in our country. We can combine TAT with peer consulting, enhancing the cooperation of the professionals. Let the headmaster and teachers work together, for the school to build a complete set of mental health intervention system, so as to effectively provide service system, the party long for students' psychological health (Lin Chongde, Wu Xinchun & Hou Zhijin, 2009). Another research on SAP volunteer training program confirms that to construct the training mechanism for SAP volunteer selection scientifically, of which is of effective (Li Tianwei & Li Fuyuan, 2013).

There are a large number of theoretical and empirical researches on peer mutual aid. Peer Mutual Aid refers to the same age who received psychological counseling for psychological help around classmates or friends, comfort and support, which provides a psychological counseling to help their interpersonal function, which can be understood as a kind of similar to the psychological consultation activities of workers engaged in non professional psychological help.

College health centers, whether large or small, often find it challenging to provide counseling and supportive services for all students (including remotely located students) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Student assistance programs (SAPs) are services provided to students through a contractual arrangement to the university or college as a part of student services. Based on the concept of positive psychology I think we can use this form of peer mutual aid in each stage of University, for different groups of students to carry out peer group cooperation, help students to improve the cognition, emotional regulation, behavior modification, so as to make them correct to try to solve the various problems in life, to learn with a good life mental state input, and gradually realize the perfection of personality. The study takes Southwest Forestry University as an example, by the Peer Committee for psychological adaptation of freshmen to carry out group activities, through the comparison between the experimental group and the controlled group. It can be confirm that the effectiveness of the work of college mental health education to

peer mutual aid model.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Experimental Object

We selected 761 freshmen in Grade 2015 from two schools as the experimental objects in Southwest Forestry University. We took 383 freshmen from the Forestry School as the experimental group, of which 181 were girls and 202 were boys. The experimental group will perform a series of group counseling activities depending upon the specific circumstances. Set the school of economics and management as a controlled group, a total of 378 people, of which 221 girls, 157 boys. The students in the controlled group were not intervened. The experimental sample is shown in Table 1.

*Table 1. Descriptive statistics of sample population statistics (n=761).*

	experimental group (n=383)		controlled group (n=378)	
	n	%	n	%
Male	202	52.7%	157	41.5%
Female	181	47.3%	221	58.5%

### 2.2. Research Scale

We used College Students Adaptability Scale compiled by Lu Xie Feng (2003). The scale is 5 points, ranging from 1 to 5. 1 means "it is absolutely not consistent with", 2 means "do not meet", 3 means "not sure", 4 means "a little bit in accordance with", 5 means "very consistent". It shows that the higher the score, the better adaptability of freshmen.

### 2.3. Research Process

The recruitment of the objects should be a caring, willing to help others, good at communication, but also in the field to help have some successful experience of the students can be competent. In our previous work, we have trained 202 SAP volunteers. We used Hollander Occupational Interest Questionnaire, Psychological Health Investigation of College students (PHI) and SAP Questionnaire as tools for selecting and evaluating the SAP volunteers. It can be seen from figure 1 that the content of SAP volunteer training system mainly includes knowledge level, skill level, ability level, and the concept level. The training contents involve the introduction of psychological counseling, SAP function, SAP information service, the integration of sap and the school organization, students' common psychological and behavioral problems and counseling skills, and recognition of mental illness and psychological crisis, self balancing and regulating technology, interpersonal communication skills, and group counseling activities and so on. Teaching, case, personal sharing, group discussion, group activities and other means for us to use. After six weeks of systematic training, the volunteers' health level and competence were significantly improved, which proved that the training content, the method is effective, and has the promotion value.



Figure 1. SAP volunteer training system design.

In this study, we selected 42 subjects from 202 volunteers as the main subjects. They are all outstanding students in the training. We have designed a comparative study method of the experimental group and the controlled group. In the experimental class we carry out 6 groups counseling to improve the adaptation ability of the experimental group every week, 90 minutes each time. The controlled group does not do any intervention. In the experiment, before the intervention

Table 2. Differences between experimental group and controlled group before intervention.

	experimental group (n=383)		control group (n=378)		T
	M	SD	M	SD	
Learning adaptability	2.17	0.62	2.19	0.56	0.60
Interpersonal adaptability	2.36	0.51	2.42	0.59	0.91
Role adaptability	2.73	0.54	2.64	0.62	0.56
Career choice adaptability	1.86	0.63	1.85	0.62	0.14
Self-care adaptability	2.89	0.53	2.96	0.58	0.61
Environmental identity	2.09	0.42	2.12	0.43	0.33
Physical and psychological symptoms	2.57	0.52	2.65	0.52	0.90
Total score	2.38	0.33	2.44	0.35	0.70

From table 2, the adaptability of the experimental group and the controlled group is quite equal. In some projects the experimental group is slightly higher than the control group, and in the other projects the control group is slightly higher than that of the experimental group, but the scores were no significant differences were observed between the experimental group and the control group. The results show that the experimental group and the control group have the same. In addition, the experimental group and the control groups in all dimensions of the scores are no more than 3; it is visible that there is a general adaptation of the problem at the beginning of the University.

### 3.2. Current Situation of College Students' Adaptability

Invite the freshmen to fill out College Students Adaptability Scale when they are enrolled in college. Two months later, the same test was carried out. Through the data, we can see that the overall situation of College Freshmen's adaptability is as follows. The results are shown in Table 3.

and after the intervention, all students of experimental group and the controlled group are required to fill out "College Student Adaptability Scale".

The two test time interval of two months, two of the 761 questionnaires were issued, 761 were recovered, after eliminating invalid questionnaires, the remaining 725 copies, effective rate is 95.3%.

### 2.4. Data Collection and Processing

From September to November 2015, peer members as the main subjects of the sample questionnaire and questionnaire were taken back on the spot. We collected data by means of collective survey, and the data were recorded and processed. Using the software SPSS 17.0 to process and analyze the data.

## 3. Results and Analysis

### 3.1. Homogeneity Test Between Experimental Group and Controlled Group

We selected two schools as the research subjects randomly. The number of students and the sex ratio of the two schools are relatively similar. On the night of the registration of freshmen, before the intervention, the adaptability of the experimental group and the controlled group was evaluated, and the results were shown in Table 2.

Table 3. The average and standard deviation of College Students' adaptation ability enrolled and two months later.

	Enrolled (n=761)		Two months later (n=761)	
	M	SD	M	SD
Learning adaptability	2.20	0.59	3.16	0.64
Interpersonal adaptability	2.45	0.56	3.25	0.61
Role adaptability	2.69	0.50	3.82	0.69
Career choice adaptability	1.89	0.61	2.69	0.62
Self-care adaptability	2.98	0.59	4.01	0.59
Environmental general identity	2.09	0.47	3.03	0.61
Physical and psychological symptoms	2.65	0.57	3.56	0.60
Total score	2.42	0.54	3.29	0.47

The College Students Adaptability Scale is 5 points, the value ranging from 1 to 5, the middle value of which is 3. It can be seen from table 3 that the overall adaptability of college students and their adaptability in all aspects have been improved two months later. In the role of adaptation and self-care adaptation score are slightly higher than other

projects. It shows that students are better able to adapt to these two aspects. The average score in career choice adaptability is relatively lower, which is most probably because of it that college students may have no direction of occupation, and they feel very confused about their future.

### 3.3. The Effectiveness of College Students' Adaptability Group Counseling Activities by Peer Support

#### 3.3.1. The Differences of the Experimental Group Before and After the Intervention

**Table 4.** Differences in the experimental group before and after the intervention.

	after the intervention (n=383)		before the intervention (n=383)		T
	M	SD	M	SD	
Learning adaptability	3.58	0.75	2.17	0.62	7.28***
Interpersonal adaptability	3.88	0.66	2.36	0.51	10.36***
Role adaptability	4.17	0.73	2.73	0.54	8.89***
Career choice adaptability	3.10	0.71	1.86	0.63	7.60***
Self-care adaptability	4.25	0.65	2.89	0.53	9.97***
Environmental identity	3.51	0.62	2.09	0.42	9.51***
Physical and psychological symptoms	3.88	0.61	2.57	0.52	9.42***
Total score	3.98	0.65	2.38	0.33	12.82***

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

According to the results of the two tests, it is not difficult to find from table 4, before and after the intervention, there were significant differences in the total score and seven factors of the adaptive ability of the experimental group, and the difference is extremely significant. It shows that the effect of experimental intervention of peer support group counseling is very good.

#### 3.3.2 Difference Comparison Between the Experimental Group and the Controlled Group Before and After Experiment

In order to test the effect of group intervention by the peer committee to carry out, we carried out independent samples t test on the adaptive test data of the experimental group and the controlled group. The results are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Differences between the experimental group and the controlled group.

	experimental group (n=383)		controlled group (n=378)		T
	M	SD	M	SD	
Learning adaptability	3.58	0.75	3.11	0.65	1.79
Interpersonal adaptability	3.88	0.66	3.40	0.57	2.74*
Role adaptability	4.17	0.73	3.69	0.60	3.53**
Career choice adaptability	3.10	0.71	2.81	0.66	0.65
Self-care adaptability	4.25	0.65	3.51	0.56	2.96**
Environmental identity	3.51	0.62	2.99	0.61	2.03*
Physical and psychological symptoms	3.88	0.61	3.35	0.70	2.38*
Total score	3.98	0.65	3.13	0.46	3.19**

Results from table 5 showed that there was a significant difference between the experimental group and the controlled group (p<0.01) in the total score of adaptive ability. In the factors of adaptive ability of the various, the results of the experimental group are better than the controlled group. In the factors of Role adaptability and Self-care adaptability, the experimental group was significantly better than the controlled group (p<0.01). In the factors of Interpersonal adaptability and Environmental identity and the physical and psychological symptoms, the experimental group is also significantly better than the controlled group (p<0.05). At the same time, we found that in terms of occupation choice adaptability, the difference between the experimental class and the controlled class is minimum, and the scores were in the middle level. The possible reason is that, on the one hand, the group counseling activities in the experimental group did not involve the specific system of career planning activities.

On the other hand, as a freshman, after the tension of high school life, they step into the "post marathon" state, also did not consider the occupation planning problems. Therefore, we can join the occupation planning activities in the future the group counseling.

## 4. Discussions

### 4.1. Analysis on the Adaptability of College Freshmen

Due to the gradual popularization of higher education, an increasing number of the young get the chance to get to college. However, after entering the new campus, the impact and challenges of the changes happened in the new environment brought about a variety of psychological inadaptability in the lives of freshmen. Many domestic scholars have carried out researches on the adaptability of college freshmen, to find types of students; gender and other

demographic variables and other psychological variables such as the quality of interpersonal communication, met cognition and professional identity, will have an impact on the adaptation (Hao Jiajia & Niu Honhwei, 2015; Niu Lingyun & Li jian, 2015; Bai Xuejun *et al.* 2013). The adaptability difference mainly displays in two aspects: on the one hand, the University Freshmen in the face of the new environment of University showed the ability to adapt to the obvious difference. From a time perspective, the university freshmen are not able to complete the adaptation in the short term. For example, some students can adapt to the environment of the University in the school within a few weeks, but some students take months or even longer. On the other hand, there are differences in the content of college freshmen. Boys, for example, are good at interpersonal communication, but may not be as good as girls in learning to adapt. Freshmen who are from the city may be relatively easy to adapt to interpersonal communication, while college freshmen who are from rural areas may be relatively poor in urban living habits and learning ability.

This study found that at the time of entering school, the overall situation of college freshmen adaptability is in general, and the score of the total score and the seven factors are not high (1.89~2.98). A variety of problems have emerged. Two months later, the adaptability of college students have a certain degree of improvement (2.69~4.01). As time goes on, college students can face up to their various roles in the study of life, they can master basic self-care ability. However, in the factor of Environment Overall Identity is relatively lower, probably due to the differences between the actual environment and the original cognition of university freshmen. This makes them a psychological gap. They are not adapt to the new environment, cannot be integrated into the new environment as soon as possible are not adapt to the new environment as soon as possible. The Score of Career choice adaptability is lowest. It shows that as a result of just entering the University, lack of experience, the freshmen feel confused about the future. Through these data, we can understand the adaptation of the freshmen in this special group has some similarities.

#### **4.2. Analysis on College Freshmen Adaptive Intervention by Peer Mutual Aid Group Activities**

The effectiveness of peer mutual aid group activities is to promote the healthy growth of students under the guidance of the target, through a series of peer group counseling activities to enable students to form a positive attitude and behavior, get emotional support, the formation of good psychological quality.

Compared with admission, through the six times peer mutual group activities intervention, the experimental group in the adaptability of the total score and seven factors has a very significant improvement. This is consistent with our hypothesis. Peer counseling is a kind of social phenomenon in human society, when people encounter setbacks in life, trouble problems, they often turn to their friends for advice and guidance to solve the problems, and the care of emotions,

comfort and encouragement. In college, peer mutual aid is easily accepted by the students, it can meet the psychological needs of students. Many studies show that when students encounter psychological problems, the first thought is self regulating, followed by a buddy talk. Therefore, our school began to establish peer counselors system since 2014, the recruitment of peer counselors through voluntary enrollment, teachers recommend students training, selection, supplemented by psychological test screening. Usually considered appropriate peer counselor personality traits including enthusiasm patience, sincere and responsible, careful listening, accepting, high empathy wisdom, and by his classmates. Higher rejection, controversial, serious deviation of students should not be chosen. In the training, pay attention to the teaching of some psychological counseling professional knowledge and technology, and focus on some group counseling and psychological quality development training activities. As it is shown from the results, the grade 2015 experiment group of freshmen have benefit deeply from grade 2014 peer group activities in the committee to carry out, and they extremely improves the adaptability significantly. It confirms that the trend of spreading different themes in different groups of college students, peer coaching activities.

#### **4.3. Peer Mutual Aid Based on the Positive Psychology**

University freshmen have the potential to adapt to the new environment, then how to treat the new students in the realization of these potential problems encountered in the process? Positive psychology has given us an enlightening way of reading. It pays more attention to the cultivation of positive mental quality, but not the correction of negative psychological diseases.

Positive psychology and peer mutual aid is on the same basis of humanism, the value essence of them are for self-help in common. From the point of view of content, positive psychology and humanism as the emphasis on the advantages and values of human nature, explore human virtues, love, forgiveness, gratitude, wisdom, control and optimism, etc., to focus on the study of human nature. Positive psychology is fully aware of the humanistic psychology ignore the personality, value and creativity depends on the social environment and historical constraints, and the study focused on positive emotion and experience, positive personality, positive emotions and health etc. Peer mutual aid is also on humanism theory as the theoretical basis, to create a good psychological environment, and to establish a constructive atmosphere in the first place. Peer mutual aid process embodies the humanistic psychologists believe in friendship to a great extent, cooperation is the human nature concept. As Roger May said, love is a kind of people and things together is a kind of power, with the power of life to all things... by giving love to find a unique form of love or love objects, and their integration with the form. In accordance with the humanistic psychology point of view, people and people are full of love and compassion, full of compassion, everyone has the desire and behavior from the psychological to help others, and everyone has the psychological needs of others to help. To a

great extent, the process of psychological mutual assistance embodies the idea of "people oriented" and "human centered". This thought contains a powerful force that individuals to realize their own value, to believe that the positive growth of the power, to believe that people have the ability to find existing problems in the development of self, and to believe that people have the ability to adjust themselves to seek mental health by changing yourself. The task of psychological mutual assistance is to help them seeking how to eliminate the obstacles and interference encountered in the growth, and inspires them to play their inner potential, so that they can move towards the track of active and healthy development. Positive psychology and peer mutual aid have a common value, that is, to help people to help themselves.

Positive psychology in the peer mutual aid activities can enhance the effect of school psychological health education. Put positive psychology into the peer counseling activities can make the value orientation of positive psychology, such as the positive qualities of human beings (courage, optimism, love, interpersonal skills, morality, faith, hope, loyalty, perseverance) spreading in peer group learning and life, delivering more positive energy. In this study, by the organization committee of peer group activities full of positive energy, such as Meet New Friends, Self Portrait, Through the Power Grid, Heart Blessing and so on. From table 6, we can see the details of the activities of the arrangement. Those activities make students feel a kind of relaxed and equal atmosphere, this atmosphere of interpersonal environment for them to provide the equal freedom and help students improve their consciousness of self independence, at the same time the era of sub culture will also affect the freshmen's outlook on life and values.

**Table 6.** Peer Mutual Aid for group activities design.

Time	Theme	Activity design
1 Sep. 7 <sup>th</sup> 2015	Meet new friends	I strong winds blow II snowball III Group agreement
2 Sep. 10 <sup>th</sup> 2015	Treasure hunt	I Squirrel moving II Treasure hunt III Guess who I am
3 Sep. 17 <sup>th</sup> 2015	Self Portrait	I Ajon Club II Animated Self-Portraits III look into the mirror
4 Sep. 26 <sup>th</sup> 2015	Career planning	I Current transfer II My future I My future I call the shots
5 Oct. 8 <sup>th</sup> 2015	My college life	New me II Love Blossoms I Untie the knot
6 Oct. 15 <sup>th</sup> 2015	My best wishes	II Looking back on the past III My best wishes

At present, there are 319 peer committee members who have passed the peer psychological training, of which 126 sophomore students, 193 freshmen. We carry out peer mutual aid continuously grope what kind of teaching method should be adopt, what kind of group counseling should be design. We also thought how to ease the students' inner anxious and restless, how to promote their overall development, so as to

better play their value to society. We believe that the peer mutual aid model based on positive psychology can continue to expand the coverage of mental health education and enhance the effectiveness of mental health education for College Students.

#### **4.4. Significance and Value of Peer Mutual Aid Based on Positive Psychology**

The psychological health education of the school usually has three level goals, the first goal is to prevent education, for all students, pay attention to the cultivation of potential development and psychological quality; the second goal is to solve the psychological problems, counseling and consultation for the common psychological problems, to eliminate the psychological barrier of students; and the third goal is in the treatment of mental illness, psychological diagnosis and treatment for mental disorders and diseases of the individual. The promulgation of the New Mental Health Law in 2012, the goal of the third levels is no longer as counselor job responsibilities. In the past school psychological health education work, School mental health education in the specific implementation process has deviated from the problem orientation. Fortunately, the offset into the positive psychology of peer mutual aid activities can rectify the school mental health education to the orientation of abnormal psychology leads to the three level education goals.

Expanding use of positive psychology cannot do without peer counseling activities, peer mutual aid is one of the specific methods of behavior theory of positive psychology, and it is under the instruction of positive psychology, easier to prevent psychological problems and mental illness. The first two goals are to make psychological problems and mental illness can be resolved in a timely manner in the shortest time; at the same time, more importantly, the use of peer mutual aid activities can enhance the effect of school psychological health education.

## **5. Conclusions**

The ideas of peer mutual aid activities based on positive psychology have a significant effect on enhancing the adaptability:

- (1) After the experimental intervention by peer mutual aid, the adaptability of the total score and each dimension were extremely significantly improved in the experimental group;
- (2) Compared with the control group, the total score and five factors were significantly improved in the experimental group. Those factors are the Role of Adaptability, Interpersonal Adaptability, Self-care Adaptability, Environmental identity and Physical and psychological symptoms.

## **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to acknowledge the Department of Student affairs in Southwest Forestry University and the

Forestry school, and superintendents, and school administrators who have helped make this a successful collaboration. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the contributions of Yu Rongsen and Zhang Shixing for their assistant during implementation, and data collection.

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