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The Psychological Entitlement among Undergraduates and Its main Demographic Factors

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Abstract

Objective: To explore the status of psychological entitlement among undergraduates, and analyze the main demographic factors. **Method:** Totally 768 undergraduates were selected by stratified random sampling from 5 colleges in Guangdong Province. They were investigated with Psychological Entitlement Scale (PES), and a self-compiled general personal information questionnaire. **Results:** The total average score of PES was (4.46±0.85). The results of multiple linear stepwise regression analysis showed that the total score of PES was positively correlated with scores of four factors like self-assessment of appearance, professional prospects, grade, and subjective helplessness ($\beta=0.073$ to 0.193 , all $P<0.01$), and negatively correlated with whether one is an only child or not ($\beta=-0.472$, $P<0.01$). **Conclusion:** The psychological entitlement of college students is at a moderate level, and its influencing factors involve multiple dimensions such as physiological factors, family factors, and individual experiences.

Keywords: College students; Psychological entitlement; Demographic factors; Multiple linear stepwise regression analysis

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1. Introduction

Psychological entitlement is a pathological sense of rights, referring to a stable and universal subjective belief or perception that individuals feel entitled to receive more privileges and are exempt from social responsibility [1]. Individuals with high psychological entitlement tend to seek benefits that are significantly higher than their actual conditions and status and take it for granted. They either believe that "I have an identity and status that surpasses others", and others must treat me exceptionally well", or that "others owe me and must compensate me". However, this identity, status, or loss does not match the reality, which reflects the existence of an excessive self-concept. Therefore, psychological entitlement is considered a negative psychological trait that often increases people's expectations of event outcomes, leading to negative outcomes such as narcissism [2-3], unfairness [4], dissatisfaction with life [5], dissatisfaction with work and salary [6], strong intention to quit [7], low sense of social responsibility [8-9], interpersonal conflicts [10], lack of loyalty to partners and empathy [1], selfish behavior [9], strong aggression [9], and vicious competition [1].

Research abroad has found that the level of psychological entitlement among college students and young employees is

increasing year by year [11], indicating that the socialization process of contemporary youth is abnormal and ineffective, and they are more likely to exhibit behaviors of poor social adaptation. This phenomenon has attracted deep attention from scholars in fields such as psychology, sociology, ethics, education, and law.

Psychological entitlement is not a natural characteristic. As an irrational belief, it is closely related to an individual's life experience. Regarding the influencing factors of psychological entitlement, previous research has focused on the following two aspects: (1) situational factors, such as negative life experiences [9], parenting styles [12], socioeconomic status [13-14], and leadership [15]. (2) individual factors, such as self-compassion [16], subjective cognition [7, 9], egalitarianism [17], attribution [18], and personality [19]. It can be seen that there is not much research on the demographic factors of psychological entitlement. As is well known, demographic factors reflect an individual's basic living conditions and have a significant impact on their psychological qualities. By studying demographic variables, it is possible to clarify the differences in psychological qualities among different populations, gain a deeper understanding of the patterns and trends of social phenomena, and provide important data support for policy formulation, social management, and intervention in problems and diseases.



Based on the above analysis, this study intends to use a large sample, multicenter questionnaire survey to explore the impact of several basic demographic variables on the psychological entitlement of college students, providing reference opinions for family upbringing and mental health education in universities.

2. Objects and Methods

2.1 Objects

A stratified random sampling was used to select students from 5 colleges and universities from Guangdong Province, including one comprehensive university, one medical university, one science and engineering university, one normal university, and one vocational college. Totally 820 questionnaires were distributed, and 768 valid questionnaires were collected, with an effective response rate of 93.66%. Among them, there are 392 males and 376 females; 175 freshmen, 161 sophomores, 151 juniors, 168 seniors, and 113 fifth-year students; 301 from cities, 268 from towns, and 199 from countries; 536 only children and 232 non only children; 274 from the medical college, 170 from the science and engineering college, 115 from the comprehensive university, 77 from the normal college, and 132 from the vocational college; 85 have very poor professional prospects, 104 have relatively poor professional prospects, 271 have average professional prospects, 169 have relatively good professional prospects, 139 have very good professional prospects; 74 students have excellent academic performance, 183 are good, 299 are average, 200 are below average, and 12 are poor; 211 class cadres; 62 divorced parents; 101 from economically prosperous families, 190 from well-off families, 296 from average families, 119 from financially disadvantaged families, and 62 from poverty families; Father's educational level: 9 illiterate, 126 primary school graduates, 251 junior high school graduates, 233 high school or vocational school graduates, and 149 college graduates or above; Mother's educational level: 23 illiterate, 222 primary school graduates, 252 junior high school graduates, 172 high school or vocational school graduates, and 99 college graduates or above; Father's occupation: 103 civil servants, 59 professional and technical personnel, 12 administrative personnel, 207 commercial or service industry employees, 38 agricultural, forestry, animal husbandry or water conservancy industry employees, 37 production or transportation industry employees, 3 military personnel, and 309 freelancers; Mother's occupation: 72 civil servants, 22 professional and technical personnel, 25 administrative personnel, 176 commercial or service industry employees, 33 agricultural, forestry, animal husbandry or water conservancy industry employees, 25 production or transportation industry employees, 1 military personnel, 414 freelancers; 84 never have subjective helplessness, 258 have mild subjective helplessness, 144 have moderate subjective helplessness, 175 have slightly serious subjective helplessness, 107 have serious subjective helplessness; 48 people think they look very ugly, 207 people think they look slightly ugly,

308 people think they have an average appearance, 96 people think they look compared pretty, 99 people think they are very beautiful.

2.2 Tools

2.2.1 Psychological Entitlement Scale, PES

PES is compiled by Campbell et al. (2004) [1], revised by Liu Guangjian et al. [20] into Chinese version, consisting of 9 items with a single-dimensional structure, used to measure the degree to which people believe they deserve more than others. The Likert 7-point scoring method is adopted to score from 1 to 7 points from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", with the 5th question scoring in reverse. The higher the total score, the higher the level of psychological entitlement. In this study, the Cronbach's α coefficient of this scale is 0.84.

2.2.2 Self-compiled general personal information questionnaire

The CNKI, Wanfang database, VIP database, Baidu, Google Scholar, Pubmed, and other Search Engines are used to search the literatures about college students' psychological entitlement (169 in Chinese and 2637 in foreign languages). Based on that, the basic content of the questionnaire are constructed, with a total of 19 items. Combined with the results of 3 collective discussions with 10 representatives of college students and 5 experts in the field of higher education, 5 items were deleted and 2 items were added. The final questionnaire for general personal information involves 16 items, which includes gender, grade, place of origin, only child status, school type, professional prospects, class ranking of academic performance, whether you are a class leader, parental marital status, family economic status, father's education level, mother's education level, father's occupation, mother's occupation, subjective helplessness, and self-assessment of appearance.

2.3 Data processing

SPSS 20.0 is used for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics are used to calculate the average score and standard deviation of each scale; multiple stepwise linear regression is used to analyze the main demographic factors of PES total score.

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive statistics

The total average score of PES in this group is (4.46 ± 0.85) , which is at a moderate level [17].

3.2 Analysis of the main demographic factors influencing psychological entitlement of college students

3.2.1 Variable assignment

First, the possible situations (alternative answers) of the demographic classification variables that may affect the total score of PES are assigned, and the results are shown in Table

Table 1 Variable Assignment

Item	Option
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1. Gender	0=male, 1=female
2. Grade	0=freshman, 1=sophomore, 2=junior, 3=senior, 4=fifth year
3. Place of origin:	0=City, 1=town, 2=country
4. Are you an only child?	0=Yes, 1=No
5. School category:	0=medical college, 1=science and engineering college, 2=comprehensive college, 3=normal university, 4=vocational college
6. Professional prospects (PP)	0=very poor, 1=relatively poor, 2=average, 3=relatively good, 4=very good
7. The class ranking for grades	0=excellent, 1=good, 2=average, 3=below average, 4=poor
8. Are you a class leader	0=yes, 1=no
9. Have parents divorced?	0=Yes, 1=No
10. Family economic status	0=affluent, 1=moderately prosperous, 2=average, 3=financially disadvantaged, 4=poverty
11. Father's educational level	0=illiteracy, 1=primary school, 2=junior high school, 3=high school or vocational school, 4=college or above
12. Mother's educational level	0=illiteracy, 1=primary school, 2=junior high school, 3=high school or vocational school, 4=college or above
13. Father's occupation	0=civil servant/cadre, 1=professional and technical personnel, 2=administrative personnel, 3=commercial or service industry employee, 4=employee of agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, fishery, or water conservancy, 5=employee of production or transportation industry, 6=military personnel, 7=freelance
14. Mother's occupation	0=civil servant/cadre, 1=professional and technical personnel, 2=administrative personnel, 3=commercial or service industry employee, 4=employee of agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, fishery, or water conservancy, 5=employee of production or transportation industry, 6=military personnel, 7=freelance
15. Subjective helplessness (SH)	0=never, 1=mild, 2=moderate, 3=slightly severe, 4=severe
16. Self-evaluation of appearance (SA)	0=very ugly, 1=somewhat ugly, 2=average, 3=compared pretty, 4=very beautiful

1.1.1 Multiple linear regression analysis of the impact of demographic factors on psychological entitlement

Taking the total average score of PES as the dependent variable and the scores of the 16 demographic variables in Table 2 as the independent variables, multiple linear stepwise regression analysis was performed within a 95% confidence interval, and the results are shown in Table 2.

From Table 2, it can be seen that the scores of four factors, including self-assessment of appearance (SA), professional prospects (PP), grade, and subjective helplessness, were positively correlated with the total score of PES ($\beta=0.073$ to 0.193 , all $P<0.01$), while “whether you are an only child” was negatively correlated with the total score of PES ($\beta=-0.472$, $P<0.01$).

Table 2 Multiple linear stepwise regression analysis of demographic factors influencing the total mean score of PES

Dependent variable	Independent variables	B	SE	β	t	P	R^2	R_{adj}^2
PES	Constant	4.419	0.135		32.674	<0.001	41.6	41.3
	Only child or not	-0.869	0.152	-0.472	-16.591	<0.001		
	SA	0.180	0.026	0.193	6.819	<0.001		
	PP	0.136	0.020	0.192	6.815	<0.001		
	Grade	0.086	0.017	0.140	4.964	<0.001		
		0.134	0.037					
	SH	0.063	0.024	0.073	2.615	0.009		



4. Discussion

The total score of PES in this group is at the same level as the results of previous literature, but there is a trend of increasing year by year [18-20]; Compared with middle and high school students of the same period, there is a significant increase, and also a trend of improvement with grade [21]. The comparison of the above research results shows that the psychological entitlement of current adolescents and young students shows a trend of increasing levels of the same age group over time, while the level of nonpeer groups during the same period increases with grade levels. This is consistent with the results of a large number of foreign studies [10, 22], indicating that there are gradually increasing obstacles to the social development of contemporary adolescents. They are more likely to have some negative traits and are more likely to engage in socially maladaptive behaviors.

The results of multiple linear stepwise regression indicate a negative correlation between whether being an only child and the total score of PES, and a positive correlation between the scores of four factors like self-assessment of appearance, professional prospects, grade, and subjective helplessness and the total score of PES.

As mentioned earlier, psychological entitlement has the following characteristics [1]: The first is believing that one should have good resources; The second is to feel that one can avoid adverse outcomes; The third is to belittle the needs of others while elevating one's own needs and embracing exaggerated expectations of no return. These unrealistic beliefs are based on the excessive self-concept of "I am the best and most valuable person, and I hold supreme status", which can be seen from the highly correlated relationship between psychological entitlement and narcissism [23].

First, the psychological entitlement of only children is higher than that of nononly children, and there is no significant difference in gender or family economic status, which is consistent with the research results of Sun Limin [24], suggesting that parenting concepts and methods have a profound impact on children's psychological quality. Throughout history, the core parenting concept of the Chinese people has been to "honor our ancestors" and "raise children to prevent aging." Under the influence of this parenting concept, children have become the hope for parents to realize their unfinished dreams, feel proud, and have a sense of security in their old age, while only children are the biggest or even only spiritual pillar for parents to maintain their self-esteem and rely on for a living. Therefore, parents have high expectations for their only children (whether they are sons or daughters), making every effort to provide them with the best living conditions, meet all their requirements, accommodate all their actions, and implement ubiquitous and close protection for them. This overly protective and indulgent parenting style [12] not only causes children to be "powerless in action", but also alienates their thinking, believing that "what they think is what they get", without considering environmental constraints and ethical, moral, and legal constraints, resulting in a high level of psychological entitlement. It

is precisely because only children (whether they are sons or daughters) enjoy the supreme status in the family, and regardless of the family's economic situation, their needs can almost always be met, even if their parents lose everything. This leads to their self-centered and even narcissistic personality traits, high levels of psychological entitlement, and insignificant differences in gender and family economic status.

Second, self-evaluation of appearance positively predicts the psychological entitlement of college students. The higher the self-evaluation of appearance, the higher the level of psychological entitlement, indicating the reinforcing effect of social stereotypes on the psychological entitlement of college students. Appearance is one of the six pillars of human self-esteem [25], and it is also the most primitive and powerful source of interpersonal attraction. People with high looks can involuntarily attract praise, help, following, and admiration from others. Due to the social stereotype of "loving one's house and admiring one's daughter", people believe that individuals with high "looks" possess many good qualities, such as strong abilities, extensive knowledge, noble character, and so on [26]. Therefore, in various aspects of life [27], education [27], employment [28-30], work and benefits [29], interpersonal relationships [31], and marriage [32], special rights and care are provided to them. Various preferential treatments can easily increase the self-esteem and personal importance of "good-looking" individuals [33] and result in higher psychological entitlement.

Third, professional prospects positively predict the psychological entitlement of college students, indicating the impact of occupational social status on individual psychological quality. Professional prospects imply a student's "status in the world" of higher education. First, the better the professional prospects, the higher the admission score, and the more intelligent the students are considered. Second, the better the professional prospects, the higher the income level, quality of life, and social status of practitioners. Therefore, students with good professional prospects are future "successful individuals". Final, majors with good employment prospects can enhance the competitiveness and influence of universities. For this reason, universities do their utmost to care for such majors: providing them with the best teaching, research, and living conditions; Try to meet their various demands as much as possible, even those that are unreasonable or excessive; In situations where resources are limited, "divert" resources that should have been allocated to other majors to majors with good employment prospects; Even when conflicts or disputes arise between teachers and students from different majors, it is obvious to favor majors with good employment prospects... All of these are countless. The result is that it suppresses the learning and work enthusiasm of other majors, further limiting their development space and potential, and "lying flat collectively." So, majors with good job prospects stand out on their own? In fact, it's not the case. They get more negative impacts. Firstly, praise and respect can easily make them complacent, making it difficult for them to keep up with the rapidly changing trends of social development. Secondly, the courtesy of "the stars supporting the

moon" has led them to develop a "self-centered" and "one-sided" personality, overemphasizing their own needs while ignoring the reasonable and even basic needs of others, ignoring moral and legal constraints, and believing that they are superior and that others should unconditionally sacrifice for themselves. In the end, a high level of psychological entitlement arises.

Fourth, this study found that as grades increase, the level of psychological entitlement among college students gradually increases, and the overall trend is consistent with Sun Limin's research findings [18-20, 24]. The results of this study showed a significant increase compared to middle and high school students of the same period, and there was a trend of improvement with grade [21, 24]. It can be seen that the level of psychological entitlement of individuals gradually increases throughout adolescence and early adulthood (university stage), indicating that there are progressive and worsening obstacles to the social development of young people and their social development is significantly delayed. As a negative psychological indicator, a lower level of psychological entitlement (i.e. total score of PES below the theoretical median of 3.6) indicates good mental health. According to normal developmental procedures, the level of psychological entitlement for minors is relatively high because they have not yet received sufficient social education. After the age of 18, due to receiving more and more sufficient social education, individuals' logical thinking ability and moral character are more and more mature, their self-concept is more and more in line with the reality, and their level of psychological entitlement decreases to below the theoretical median of 3.6. However, this article and many similar literature from the same period have shown that during the university stage, an individual's level of psychological entitlement increases with grade, and the level in each grade is higher than the theoretical median. This is likely due to the influence of exam-oriented education, where both young and college students focus on professional learning, insufficient social education, and serious deficiencies in logical learning, psychological quality training, moral cultivation, and legal learning. As a result, from grade one to university graduation, individuals' self-concept has not fully developed, and their understanding of how much legitimate authority they should have is unclear. In this way, under the increasingly strong stress of learning and employment, they are prone to demanding higher and more qualified authority from schools and even society, and strongly appeal: "Without such authority and resources, I cannot survive."

Final, this study also found that subjective helplessness positively predicts the psychological entitlement of college students, suggesting the strengthening effect of self-concept defensive enhancement on individual psychological entitlement. Subjective helplessness is a feeling of frustration, which refers to an individual's belief that no one has reached out to help them when they need it. Of course, this means that the person asking for help has made a lot or even sacrificed a lot for others. Subjective helplessness can easily lead to a sense of unfairness and guilt, thereby triggering or exacerbating a sense of psychological

entitlement [16]. They usually have the following complaints: "I am honest, hardworking, and taking on the most difficult and tiring tasks. Why does everyone turn a blind eye to my hard work and why do I never receive any praise or reward? When I am in trouble, everyone has the ability to help me, but no one has extended a helping hand, and many people are even still gloating. People are clearly exploiting my labor force, depriving me of my rightful rights, owing me debts, and owing me kindness." Since they think have suffered unfair treatment, there is naturally a demand for repayment, and they naturally believe that they should have the right to receive more and better than others.

5. Conclusion

This study preliminarily explores the current status of psychological entitlement among college students and its main demographic factors, proving that the psychological entitlement of college students is formed after birth, and its influencing factors involve multiple dimensions including physiological factors such as appearance, family structure such as whether they are only children, personal experience such as grade, professional prospects, and subjective helplessness. This proposition provides useful reference opinions for family upbringing and mental health education. In the future, we need to add longitudinal and cross-cultural research data to reveal the long-term trends of psychological entitlement among college students.

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