

# Research on Problems with Developing the Force of Psychological Monitors in Higher Vocational Colleges and the Path to Optimization and Improvement

Fei Yuan

Faculty of Chemical and Pharmaceutical Engineering, Chongqing Industry Polytechnic College, Chongqing, China  
Email: yuanaelite@qq.com

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## Abstract

Psychological Monitors are strong support for higher vocational colleges in mental health education, as well as one of the specific practices regarding the basic tasks of “psychological education”. Psychological Monitors are selected and take root among students, serving as a bridge and bond between students and mental health teachers and counselors (homeroom teachers) and an important basic force for the work on mental health of higher vocational students. Therefore, it is inevitable for higher vocational colleges to improve the Psychological Monitor system and strengthen the development of the force of Psychological Monitors in strengthening the work on mental health.

## Keywords

Higher Vocational Colleges, Psychological Monitors, Path to Optimization and Improvement

## 1. Introduction

Psychological Monitors refer to class committee members who specifically undertake relevant duties in mental health education in classes of colleges (Chen & Sang, 2019). The Psychological Monitors are an important force in the backbone of college students and an important force for peer psychological support and peer mutual assistance, which was first introduced in China Agricultural University and Tianjin University etc. In 2004, Tianjin University fully implemented the Psychological Monitor system, where it first proposed and implemented a crisis early warning and rapid intervention and response mechanism based on the “Psychological Monitors”. This practice became an instant hit in China. At present, the

important role of Psychological Monitors has received increasingly more attention. As an important way to carry out mental health education at school, various universities have derived “psychological informants”, “mental health attendants” and other positions in the backbone of students based on the reality of school and students, and the Psychological Monitor system is thereby rapidly popularized. According to the Blue Work on China’s Psychological Monitors—Twelve Years for National Collection of Psychological Monitors’ Affairs released in 2018, the psychological monitor system has been popularized in classes of junior colleges and above, and the estimated number of psychological monitors exceeds 740,000 (Ma & Ouyang, 2020). Psychological monitors are an important force in the three-level network of mental health education and crisis intervention in colleges, playing the role of a demonstrator in maintenance of mental health, a promoter of basic knowledge of mental health, a discoverer of students with psychological crisis, and a supporter of the mental health maintenance. Therefore, psychological monitors play an important role mental health education and mutual psychological assistance among students at higher vocational colleges.

## **2. The Important Practical Significance and Value of Development of the Psychological Monitors**

### **2.1. It Helps to Give Full Play to the Role of a “Whistle Blower” in Mental Health Early Warning**

In 2001, the Ministry of Education issued the Opinions on Strengthening the Mental Health Education of College Students in Regular Institutions of Higher Learning, after which the work on mental health education in colleges has achieved fast progress (Ma & Ouyang, 2020). In February 2011, the Ministry of Education proposed for the first time that colleges should have a sound three-level mental health education network that covers the school, colleges (departments), and classes, and issued the Basic Construction Standards for Mental Health Education of Students in Regular Institutions of Higher Learning (Trial). Since then, the psychological monitors have become an important part of the work on mental health education in Chinese colleges, and psychological monitor system was established in many universities, playing an important role in mental health education at the most primary level among students (Zhan & Xia, 2022). According to the current practice of psychological monitors in colleges, psychological monitors come from and take root in students, being one of the best mental health workers among students. They play an active role in publicity of mental health, organization of class psychological activities, creation of mental health in campus, timely identification and reporting of students in need of psychological attention, guidance to students in seeking professional psychological counseling, etc. They are an irreplaceable “whistle blower” with the convenience in obtaining first-hand information about students’ psychological problems, and also a “transit station” that recommends students to seek professional psychological counseling, which can effectively enhance the sensitivity, alertness and effectiveness in identification and

intervention of students' psychological problems.

### **2.2. It Helps to Supplement the Force in Mental Health Education**

In the 1990s and even at the beginning of the 21st century, Chinese colleges faced a shortage of full-time mental health teachers, most of which even did not have full-time teachers (Ma & Ouyang, 2020). In accordance with Special Action Plan for Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving the Work on Mental Health of Students in the New Era (2023-2025) issued by the Ministry of Education and other sixteen departments, "colleges shall be equipped with full-time mental health teachers at a teacher-to-student ratio of not less than 1:4000, and each school shall have at least 2 mental health teachers". Judging from above requirements, mental health teachers in colleges are still in great shortage in practical work. In the contract to increased enrollment in higher vocational colleges, the growth of full-time mental health teachers is weak. Therefore, mental health teachers are helpless in their work due to shortage of hands and increased workload and labor intensity (Wang, 2017). The strengthening of the force of psychological monitors in higher vocational colleges can effectively make up for the shortage of full-time mental health teachers. Through the development and training of high-caliber and high-level psychological monitors, a three-level work system consisting of "psychological monitors-counselors (class teachers)-psychological counseling center" can be formed to optimize the work structure of mental health education in higher vocational colleges, which is conducive to improving the overall quality and efficiency of mental health education and giving full play to the "peer" psychological education (Vriend, 1969).

### **2.3. It Helps to Expand the Channels for Students with Psychological Problems to Seek Help**

There are natural role differences between mental health teachers and students. Teachers' life, values, experience, and academic background are all different from students, which may cause problems such as poor communication with students. Compared with mental health teachers, most students still tend to confide their problems and puzzles to peers (Rickwood et al., 2005), the psychological monitors have an inherent advantage in helping students in the class. Since psychological monitors are also students with similar life experiences, emotional experiences, and the same learning environment and get along with the students all day long, they are easily accepted and can timely identify abnormalities. Hence, they can choose a more appropriate and preferred way to offer help, accept each other and develop emotional resonance, thereby enhancing the effect of help.

### **2.4. It Helps to Improve Self-Psychological Adjustment of the Psychological Monitors**

Psychological monitors are members of the backbone team of students in the class, selected by higher vocational colleges through standardized and scientific procedures. On the one hand, they receive training in professional psychological know-

ledge from mental health teachers, such as the special training on provision of help and communication skills, which improves their overall ability to offer psychological support. On the other hand, in helping students with psychological needs, they undergo introspection, self-awareness, and self-cognition, and further improve self-growth while helping others, which enhances comprehensive self-adjustment.

### **2.5. It Helps to Break the Shackles of Time and Space for Psychological Confiding and Counseling**

As psychological monitors live and learn together with students, they have advantages over lives in terms of time and space. They can provide face-to-face and one-to-one communication at any place and any suitable time without limitations of time and space, which effectively breaks the shackles of time and space in provision of psychological help and enhances flexibility and convenience.

## **3. Current Drawbacks in Development of the Force of Psychological Monitors**

### **3.1. The Selection Mechanism Is Not Standardized Enough**

In many higher vocational colleges, there are still major problems in the selection mechanism of Psychological Monitors. In terms of the selection system, there are no clear rules on the responsibilities, competencies, and selection criteria of psychological monitors. Psychological monitors are often selected in accordance with the standards for selecting other class committee cadres and student backbone. At the same time, the counselor (class teacher) does not recognize the particularity of psychological monitor, which gives rise to problems such as imperfect and irregular selection mechanisms. In terms of selection methods, it mainly relies on self-recommendation, direct appointment by counselor (class teacher), and voting, etc. In these approaches, it is difficult to judge whether a candidate is qualified for the role of psychological monitor, and whether his/her personality, personality traits, psychological conditions, etc. are suitable for the position. What's more, the psychological monitor is concurrently held by the monitor or league branch secretary, etc., which causes confusion of functions and responsibilities to a certain extent, as a result of which the psychological monitor cannot properly provide psychological peer support. In addition, they may be circumstances where a student with serious psychological problems intends to serve or has already served as the psychological monitors because they want to benefit themselves by providing help to others out of a strong sense of seeking help. However, the fact is that such students are often incompetent in taking this position.

### **3.2. Psychological Literacy Needs to Be Strengthened**

Although higher vocational colleges have basically set up the positions of psychological monitor at the time of enrollment of freshmen, there are still problems such as imperfect on-campus training mechanism, lack of systematization of

training, and weak pertinence of training. They often focus on fragmented training such as “5-25” mental health festival, college students’ mental health month and other activities and lectures, psychological monitors’ meetings, and group counseling, lacking systematic psychological counseling skills, and group counseling system (Cai, 2024). The training method is also relatively single, mainly in the form of counseling reports, knowledge lectures, etc. The training time is also short and the effect is not ideal. In terms of training content, there is a lack of specific practical cases, analytical skills, workshops, etc., with preference of mental health knowledge over training on professional skills and professional ethics. In terms of trainees, there is no distinction in training between senior and junior grades, or hierarchical training based on the psychological characteristics and psychological problems of students in different grades. For example, for freshman, attention should be paid to their adaptation to school, etc., and for junior students, the attention should be shifted to job search and employment anxiety, etc.

### **3.3. The Functions of Psychological Monitors Are Not Fully Realized**

In the practice in higher vocational colleges, it has been found that students and teachers often believe that the psychological monitors are not main student cadres or backbone and are even dispensable, failing to give high degree of recognition. Usually, except for the appearance during meetings or training, psychological monitors are usually basically hidden. At the same time, some psychological monitors lack the awareness of initiative or corresponding skills in providing psychological support, which affects the effect of peer psychological support (Hoffman, 1976); some psychological monitors lack the passion and motivation to take the initiative to learn, and the means of psychological support are single and solid, without a clear understanding of their functions and responsibilities. Coupled with the lack of training and supervision, they often have no idea about how to carry out their work. These factors will affect the peer psychological support of psychological monitors in practice, and overall functions of psychological monitors are not fully realized.

## **4. Path and Strategies to Optimization of the Development of the Force of the Psychological Monitors in Higher Vocational Colleges**

### **4.1. Optimize the Selection Mechanism**

First, optimize the selection system. Students only spend three years in higher vocational colleges. The school should design the relevant system on psychological monitors scientifically and rationally on this basis, formulate corresponding rules to clarify the selection criteria, selection procedures, selection ratio, term of office, and rotation of psychological monitors. For example, for freshmen, the psychological monitors are selected within 1 month after entry into the school, and are given a 1-month probation period. Depending on the proportion of male and

female students, a male and a female psychological monitor may be selected. Except for special circumstances, at least one full-time psychological monitor should be selected in each class; At the same time, specific rules should be made on failure to pass the probation period and rotation after expiration of the term of office (Tuo, 2019). Second, optimize the selection process. Because of the particularity of the post, the selection of psychological monitors needs to be different from that of selection of other student cadres, and be subject to strict procedures. In terms of the selection process, higher vocational colleges should abandon the previous class voting, but require multiple rounds of checks at the links of voluntary registration, class voting, and comprehensive checks by counselor (class teacher), and receipt of training at the school's mental health center. Only eligible psychological monitors are allowed to take the post, and those who are not qualified should undergo further training or be eliminated, so as to ensure the overall quality and competence of psychological monitors. Third, formulate a model of the competency of psychological monitors. The selected psychological monitors should not only have the comprehensive competence, but have the professional qualities of being responsible for psychological work. Studies have pointed out that music group nature, stability, power of observation, communication skills, organizational skills, high self-efficacy, helpful characteristics, sense of responsibility, and good mental health can be adopted as a reference for the selection of psychological monitors (Fan, 2022). The higher vocational colleges can also compile a set of competency testing tools and selection criteria with own characteristics based on the characteristics and needs of students.

#### 4.2. Optimize the Training System

First, the Diversification of Training Methods. Owing to the characteristics of work, psychological monitors are required to have excellent psychological qualities and a certain degree of professionalism. Higher vocational colleges should abandon traditional training methods, without the limitation to reports and lectures by mental health teachers, change the mere means of training such as conferences and lectures, and establish systematic long-term training programs for psychological monitors. Instead, they should introduce case teaching, group counseling, and melodrama, etc. to stimulate the enthusiasm of psychological monitors for learning and enhance their understanding and application of psychological knowledge. If conditions permit, refined internal closed small-class training can also be carried out, and simple and quick NLP psychotherapy, group counseling and other counseling skills can be appropriately taught, so as to effectively improve the psychological counseling skills of psychological monitors (Zhan & Lu, 2019). Second, use digitalization to empower training. The schools should break through the traditional classroom training methods, introduce micro classes, and MOOC courses to break the time and space constraints of traditional training, and rely on the Internet to make learning more convenient and easier. At the same time, the modularization of online course teaching units makes it easier to stimulate the enthusiasm

of psychological students for learning. For example, in December 2006, the National University Psychological Monitors Research Collaboration Group was established, and the exploratively launched the national training certificate system for college psychological monitors. At present, in addition to the MOOC standard established for college psychological monitors, an online certification platform for college psychological monitors MOOC has been established to conduct online special training for psychological monitors. Those who pass the assessment can obtain a certificate of college psychological monitor (Ma & Ouyang, 2020). Third, enrich the training content. Due to the professional nature of the job of psychological monitors, higher requirements are raised for the training of psychological monitors. Job awareness training should be carried out before assumption of the post. For example, attentions should be paid to training on their psychological quality, role positioning and work boundaries. After they take the post, there should be training on professional knowledge, professional skills, professional cognition, ethics, such as basic knowledge of psychology, psychological counseling theory, symptoms and identification methods of common psychological problems in college students, and the use of commonly used psychological testing tools. In addition, job pride training is also needed. It is found that the motivation of psychological monitor in performance of their duties has decreased without burnout. Psychological volunteer services, such as visiting local nursing homes for the elderly, can also be used to enhance the job pride and promote the long-term sustainability of the work of psychological monitors (Wang & Yuan, 2023).

### **4.3. Improve the Evaluation Mechanism**

First, Standardize Management. Psychological monitors are different from other class committee cadres. Although they are class cadres, they are subject to multiple management of class counselors (class teachers), colleges and school mental health centers. At the same time, the colleges and counselors (class teachers) should be the main role in the management. The school's mental health center is responsible for business guidance and training, and the college and counselors (class teachers) are responsible for daily management, and scientific and effective management of the psychological monitors. Second, standardize the evaluation. The school's mental health center can be responsible for comprehensively co-ordination in the evaluation of psychological monitors, and strengthen the evaluation from the aspects of their participation in training, the development of class psychological activities, and the completion of daily psychological work; in addition, it is necessary to establish multi-form of assessment that cover schools, colleges, and classes with focuses on class assessment, and link the achievement of objective of psychological work with the self-evaluation of psychological monitors, the evaluation of the psychological work by students, and the evaluation by the counselor (homeroom teacher) and the mental health center, so that each psychological monitor is assessed in an objective, fair and just manner. Third, strengthen incentives. An effective incentive mechanism should be created through a good incentive strategy,

so as to enhance the enthusiasm and initiative of psychological monitors in their work. Honors such as “Outstanding Psychological Monitor”, “Advanced Psychological Workers”, and “Advanced Mental Health Education Class Collective” can be established. Outstanding psychological monitors can be rewarded or recognized by granting scholarships, honorary certificates, etc., to stimulate their enthusiasm and sense of responsibility in the work and prevent slack psychology (Cheng, 2022). The higher vocational colleges should also strengthen cooperation with the National University Psychological Monitors Research Collaboration Group, strengthen online special training of psychological monitors, and encourage psychological monitors to obtaining certificates of psychological monitors.

## 5. Conclusion

In short, Psychological Monitors are strong support for higher vocational colleges in mental health education, as well as one of the specific practices regarding the basic tasks of “psychological education”. To address the current challenges in the psychological committee team’s selection process, competency of psychological support, and committee roles, we aim to enhance the selection process, nurture system, and assessment mechanisms to develop a top-tier psychological committee team. This, in turn, will foster high-quality mental health initiatives in vocational colleges.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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