The Mediating Effect of Self-efficacy between the Healthy Morning Habits and Life Satisfaction of College Students

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Abstract: This study is based on Bandura's social cognitive theory and explores the influence of healthy morning habits on the life satisfaction of college students and the mediating role of self-efficacy. The healthy morning routine encompasses three aspects: regular sleep schedule, nutritious breakfast, and morning environment tidying. By enhancing an individual's self-efficacy, it can improve life satisfaction. The research has revealed the internal mechanism by which morning habits affect mental health, providing theoretical basis and practical references for college mental health education.

Keywords: Healthy Morning Routine; Self-Efficacy; Life Satisfaction; Undergraduate Student

1. Introduction

The university stage is a crucial period for an individual's transition from adolescence to adulthood. The reformation of lifestyle and the construction of psychological qualities occur simultaneously during this period. In recent years, the university student population has faced increasingly severe mental health challenges. Multiple issues such as academic pressure, interpersonal adaptation, and self-identity are intertwined and overlapping, making life satisfaction a core indicator for measuring the mental health level of college students [1]. At the same time, more and more studies have begun to focus on the profound influence of daily living habits on psychological states, among which morning habits, as the starting point of a day's life, play an undeniable role in shaping the psychological state throughout the day and long-term quality of life. A large-scale study by the Institute of Behavioral Science and Health at University College London showed that people typically have the best psychological state when they wake up in the morning, with the lowest scores for depression and anxiety, and the peaks of happiness, life satisfaction, and sense of value reaching at dawn, while they reach the lowest point at midnight [2]. This study was based on over one million psychological measurement data collected from March 2020 to March 2022, with a sample of 49,218 British adults, and has high ecological validity and statistical power. This finding provides a solid empirical basis for the association between morning habits and mental health.

However, the reason why morning habits affect life satisfaction and the psychological mechanism behind it have not been fully revealed. Self-efficacy, as a core construct in Bandura's social cognitive theory, refers to an individual's belief and judgment about whether they can use the skills they possess to complete a certain task. It may play a crucial bridging role between healthy behaviors and psychological well-being [3]. Existing studies have shown that self-efficacy mediates the relationship between physical exercise and negative emotions [4], also has a partial mediating effect between procrastination behavior and academic satisfaction [5], and forms a chain mediating path through task-oriented coping styles between psychological advantages and life satisfaction [6]. Based on this, this study aims to systematically explore how healthy morning habits influence the life satisfaction of college students through self-efficacy as a psychological influence, and discuss its application value in college mental health education.

2. Core Concept Definitions and Theoretical Foundation

2.1 The Connotation and Dimensions of Healthy Morning Habits

Healthy morning habits are not a simple collection of individual behaviors, but rather a system of lifestyle with inherent logical connections. From the perspective of behavioral science, the healthy morning habits of college

students mainly consist of three core dimensions. The first is regularsleep schedule and early rising, that is, getting up at a fixed time and maintaining a stable sleep rhythm. Psychological interventions aimed at improving sleep among college students have also been systematically reviewed, highlighting the importance of sleep regulation as a key health-related behavior in this population [7]. A study by the University of Toronto in Canada found that both young and elderly people who habitually get up early not only perform better throughout the day but also have a healthier body. The research of the British Psychological Society also pointed out that compared with those who get up later, early risers are slimmer, happier, and healthier, while those who stay up late consume an average of 248 more calories per day and consume more fast food and less fruits and vegetables [8]. The second is the persistence of a nutritious breakfast, a study conducted by institutions such as the Puebla American University covering 42 countries and 154,151 children and teenagers aged 10 to 17 showed that individuals who eat breakfast on time have the highest life satisfaction, while those who do not eat breakfast at all rank at the bottom. There is a nearly linear positive correlation between the frequency of breakfast intake and life satisfaction [9]. The third is the environmental tidying and psychological adjustment after getting up, including actions such as cleaning the desk and planning the tasks for the day. These seemingly trivial habits actually lay the sense of order and control for a day's life.

2.2 The Theoretical Connotation of Self-Efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy was proposed by psychologist Bandura, and its core meaning is the belief of an individual in their ability to successfully complete a specific task or cope with challenges. This belief is not empty self-comfort but a positive cognition based on a solid experience foundation. Bandura pointed out that the formation of self-efficacy depends on four main information sources. The first is behavioral achievement, that is, personal successful experiences, which is the most influential source of efficacy information. Multiple successes will increase self-efficacy, while repeated failures will reduce it. The second is alternative experience, that is, indirect experience obtained by observing the success or failure of others with similar abilities and personality traits. When individuals lack a realistic judgment basis for their own certain aspects of ability, the influence of alternative experience is particularly prominent. The third is verbal persuasion, that is, encouragement and affirmation from others, but unbased on experience, verbal persuasion has relatively fragile effects. Only persuasion based on direct experience or alternative experience can truly play a role. The fourth is physiological and emotional state, positive emotional experiences help to enhance efficacy judgment, while anxiety and tension may weaken an individual's confidence in their own ability.

The impact of self-efficacy on an individual's mental health is multi-faceted and profound. Individuals with high self-efficacy are usually more optimistic, more confident, better at coping with stress and difficulties, and view failures as opportunities for learning and growth rather than a denial of self-worth. In contrast, individuals with low self-efficacy are prone to anxiety, inferiority complex, and helplessness, and tend to avoid or give up easily when facing difficulties. The research of Wang Cai-kang and Liu Yong shows that students with low self-efficacy are more likely to experience anxiety when facing stressful life events and are prone to feeling helpless in life, while students with high self-efficacy are better at handling various life events, even when feeling difficulties, they will try to overcome them and are less likely to experience anxiety.

2.3 The Psychological Implications of Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a comprehensive subjective evaluation of one's quality of life based on their own set standards, and is the core component of subjective well-being, as well as an important indicator for evaluating mental health. There is a very strong connection between self-efficacy and subjective well-being, and there are very significant differences in subjective well-being among people with different degrees of self-efficacy. This is because people with high self-efficacy often think that their success comes from their own ability and hard work, while their failure comes from lack of hard work or things beyond their control. This positive way of looking at things can help people become more motivated, feel more positive emotions and reduce anxiety, so as to feel better in life.

3. The Impact Path of Morning Health Habits on College Students' Life Satisfaction

3.1 Direct Association between Morning Habits and Life Satisfaction

From the perspective of positive psychology, the influence of good morning habits on life satisfaction can be explained by positive activity model. This model says that when people use their strength purposefully and carry out positive and conscious activities, they can feel positive emotions and have positive thoughts and behaviors, thus improving their subjective well-being. The habit of morning is the daily support of these positive activities. Eating breakfast regularly can provide the brain with the energy and nutrition it needs. In addition, it helps to improve attention, memory and learning efficiency. Continued lack of these nutrients will gradually weaken a person's health and life satisfaction. Getting up early brings a sense of order and a positive atmosphere to the day, which makes people have more psychological resources after encountering problems. The behavior of protecting the environment by establishing order outside strengthens internal control and reduces the cognitive burden and emotional fatigue caused by chaos.

3.2 Indirect Mechanism of Morning Habits on Life Satisfaction

However, the influence of morning habits on life satisfaction comes not only from direct channels. There are more complicated psychological mechanisms behind it. Research shows that useful knowledge and its correct use can affect life satisfaction through two variables: general self-efficacy and task-oriented replication style, and self-efficacy plays a chain role. Similarly, the influence of sports on negative emotions is realized through self-efficacy, while social self-efficacy affects the happiness of new college students through social support and adaptation chain. All these studies show an important point: self-efficacy may be the key psychological connection between healthy behavior and mental health.

By applying this logic to morning habits, we can construct the following reasoning. When college students form good habits in the morning, they will do some small and fixed things every day. These persistent small achievements are the most solid source of self-efficacy, that is, behavioral achievements. Whenever they get up on time, whenever they have a well-prepared breakfast, and whenever they put the table in order, they will tell themselves that I can control my life. This belief in their effectiveness comes from small achievements every day and gradually becomes a positive idea of their overall ability, which increases their overall self-efficacy. People with high self-efficacy tend to use task-oriented ways when they are under pressure at school, have problems with others, or have uncertain future, and they use less negative strategies, such as emotion or avoidance. Therefore, they maintain better mental health and greater life satisfaction.

4. Mediation Effect Analysis of Self-Efficacy

4.1 Theoretical Basis of Self-Efficacy as a Mediating Variable

According to Bandura's social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is not only the result of behavior, but also the driving force of behavior. A person's belief in his own ability directly affects his behavior choice, effort and perseverance. When college students have accumulated many successful experiences by following healthy morning habits, their sense of self-efficacy will increase. This increase has spillover effect and affects other parts of life. Specifically, students with high self-efficacy are more willing to cope with challenges in their studies, more brave in expressing themselves in their relationships with others, and more capable of persisting rather than avoiding problems. This kind of good behavior in all fields will eventually bring greater satisfaction to life.

According to the attribution theory, Weiner believes that the way people interpret the results of behavior will greatly change their emotions, expectations and subsequent actions. People with high self-efficacy tend to attribute their success to their own abilities and efforts, and their failure to lack of efforts or external factors. This positive attribution style can protect self-esteem and maintain motivation. Small achievements every day, such as a healthy morning routine, are examples of this positive attribution model. When a person can successfully get up every morning, have breakfast and get organized, he will gradually believe, "I am a person with executive ability." This belief will also change her views on learning, relationships with others and future

plans, which will enrich her life.

4.2 Specific Functioning Mode of the Mediating Effect

The self-efficacy mediation effect between healthy morning habits and life satisfaction can be understood from the following three levels. The first level is the direct transformation of efficiency belief. Sticking to the morning dress itself is a self-management behavior. Every successful implementation strengthens the belief that I can do it, which directly improves the personal sense of control and life satisfaction. The second level is the optimization of cooperation strategy. Research shows that individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to adopt task-oriented replication strategies, but less likely to use negative strategies oriented by emotions or avoidance. The sense of order and control cultivated by healthy morning clothes makes individuals more likely to take positive reactions when facing different stress events during the day, thus reducing the negative impact of stress on life satisfaction. The third level is the accumulation of positive emotions. According to the positive activity model, conscious positive behavior can trigger positive emotions, and positive emotions in turn contribute to more positive behaviors. The morning dress begins this positive cycle, and self-efficacy is the main psychological fuel to keep the cycle running.

It is worth noting that the mediating effect of self-efficacy is not linear and unidirectional, but dynamic and cumulative. As the research shows, self-efficacy plays a mediating role between welfare and life satisfaction. Dominant knowledge and use are positively related to self-efficacy, and self-efficacy is positively related to task-oriented adaptation strategies. In the end, all these lead to the improvement of life satisfaction. Similarly, the effect of morning clothes accumulates and enlarges with the passage of time. At first, this may only show the improvement of mood, but in the long run, it will become a systematic improvement of life satisfaction.

5. Application Value and Practical Implications

5.1 Intervention Ideas for College Mental Health Education

On the basis of the above theoretical analysis, psychological health education in colleges and universities can design an intervention plan around the development of healthy early-rising clothes from the perspective of self-efficacy. Different from traditional problem-oriented intervention, the advantage-based intervention focuses more on the positive aspects and internal strength of individuals, and is simple to operate, which helps individuals formulate and implement the plan according to their own situation. Specifically, practice or counseling programs related to psychological advantages can be designed to help students identify and recognize their own advantages, and through a series of activities and plan formulation, increase the frequency and initiative of individuals to exert their advantages. In the cultivation of morning habits, starting from the smallest action unit, such as setting a micro-goal of getting up ten minutes earlier each day, or increasing the frequency of having a nutritious breakfast once a week, through continuous small successes, efficacy beliefs can be accumulated.

During the intervention process, teachers and counselors should pay attention to providing real and constructive feedback, avoiding unrealistic and exaggerated encouragement. Bandura clearly pointed out that verbal persuasion without an experience basis is fragile in forming efficacy judgments, and only encouragement based on direct experience or alternative experience can truly play a role. Therefore, the intervention plan should first ensure that students obtain practical success experiences, and then give affirmation and reinforcement on this basis, so that students can truly experience their progress and see their own advantages and highlights, thereby stimulating their internal motivation and confidence.

5.2 Attribution Training and Efficacy Maintenance

While cultivating healthy morning habits, attribution training should also be carried out to guide students to make positive attributions. When students encounter repeated or setbacks in habit formation, they should be helped to attribute failure to factors such as insufficient effort or inappropriate strategies, rather than the uncontrollable factor of insufficient ability. This attribution method can protect self-efficacy from being damaged and maintain the individual's motivation for action. At the same time, students should be encouraged to establish a success

experience bank, regularly review the progress they have made in habit formation, and transform the successful experiences into transferable method models through explicit and abstract ways, so as to quickly call them when encountering similar situations, thereby truly enhancing confidence and reducing unnecessary fear and anxiety.

5.3 Building a Supportive Environment

The improvement of self-efficacy cannot be separated from the assistance of the social support system. Studies have shown that individuals with high self-efficacy in a new environment can obtain more social support, and the obtained social support can effectively predict the individual's adaptation level and subjective well-being. Colleges can create a supportive morning habit formation environment for students through dormitory culture construction, peer mutual assistance groups, etc. When students see their peers also persist in healthy morning habits and benefit from them, the efficacy information of alternative experience is activated, further strengthening the individual's self-efficacy. Moreover, peer support can regulate the individual's neuroendocrine system and immune function through emotional support, reducing the risk of illness, and thereby providing a physiological guarantee for the improvement of life satisfaction.

6. Conclusion

The association between healthy morning habits and life satisfaction has been confirmed by numerous large-scale studies, and self-efficacy plays an irreplaceable mediating role in this relationship. Morning habits help to make a person more confident in himself through small achievements every day. When you have confidence in yourself, you will find better ways to deal with problems, look at things in a positive way and feel happier. All these make the life of college students more fulfilling. This discovery shows how this mechanism works, and it helps us to better understand the positive activity model and social cognitive theory in the field of health habits. This also gives a simple and useful idea to help students keep mental health in college. In the future, you must start with small things to gain confidence and change a little every day. Therefore, every morning can be a new beginning for students to live a more fulfilling life.

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