The Fight against the Epidemic Highlights the Urgency of the Construction of Social Psychological Service System

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Abstract: Since December 2019, the fast-spreading coronavirus disease has ravaged China, threatening people’s lives and health and affecting China’s economic and social development. The development of the epidemic and the effectiveness of prevention and control will not only directly affect the physical and mental health of individuals, but also affect the social and psychological behaviors such as government trust, interpersonal trust, risk communication, economic confidence, consumption behavior and social mentality. In the epidemic prevention and control, as well as national emergency management and social governance, it is urgent to improve and promote the construction of social psychological service system. It is suggested to improve the emergency management laws and regulations in time and incorporate the social psychological service guarantee system into the emergency management system; build a professional team of social psychological services for emergency management, and guide social forces to play their role in a standardized and orderly manner; give full play to the role of network and information technology to realize the accurate connection and refined management of psychosocial service needs and resources in emergency management; strengthen the research on emergency management psychology to provide knowledge accumulation and scientific support for improving the governance system, improving governance efficiency and improving governance ability.

Keywords: Public health events; Emergency management; Psychosocial services

1. Introduction

The coping with the COVID-19 outbreak is a major test to our governance system and governance capability, and also a critical test of our social psychological service system and crisis intervention mechanism. The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed to “strengthen the construction of social psychological service system and cultivate a social mentality of self-esteem, self-confidence, rationality, peace and positive progress”. The Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee stressed that “we should...
improve the social psychological service system and crisis intervention mechanism, and improve the comprehensive mechanism for multiple prevention, mediation and resolution of social contradictions and disputes”. General Secretary Xi Jinping, when investigating the epidemic prevention and control work in Beijing, emphasized that it is necessary to comprehensively strengthen social management and control, and to do psychological intervention and other work in place to maintain overall social stability. The response to the epidemic once again highlights the importance and urgency of the construction of social psychological service system. We must deeply analyze, seriously reflect and strive to solve the basic and systematic problems in the construction of social psychological service system, and promote the institutionalization, procedure, standardization and rule of law of social governance and emergency management.

2. Status Quo and Challenges

Individual and social psychological needs are often intertwined with life safety, material needs and interest demands, which not only affect the epidemic prevention and control and post epidemic reconstruction, but also affect the overall situation of economic and social development. People’s yearning for a better life and the advanced level of social civilization are not only reflected in the material level of emergency response, but also reflected in the psychological level of safety and security. In the work of epidemic prevention and control, in the national emergency management and social governance, we must pay attention to psychological construction.

2.1. Effectiveness of psychosocial services in epidemic prevention and control

Compared with the COVID-19 service after the SARS and Wenchuan earthquake, the social psychological service of the coronavirus disease has made great progress, and the effectiveness of the social psychological service system has been initially apparent. The State Council, in response to the infectious disease prevention and control mechanism of coronavirus infection, issued the Notice on Guiding Principles of Emergency Psychological Crisis Intervention for the Epidemic of Pneumonia Transmitted by Coronavirus Disease on 27th January, 2020, Notice on Establishing a Psychological Assistance Hotline for Epidemic Diseases, on 2th February and Notice on Issuing Guidelines for the Psychological Assistance Hotline during the Prevention and Control of Coronavirus Disease on 7th February to guide all localities to carry out psychosocial services in an orderly manner.

At the same time, China’s psychological circles have also taken positive action. Chinese Psychological Association, Chinese Association of Social Psychology, China Association for Mental Health and other academic organizations took initals, and jointly issued the Service Guideline for Online Psychological Assistance during the Prevention and Control of Covid-19 on 12th February, 2020. The clinical psychology Registration Committee of the Chinese Psychological Association quickly released professional guidelines such as Graded and Phased Disposal of Anti-Epidemic Psychological Assistance; Guidelines for online psychological counseling in special epidemic periods; Ethical Norms for Hotline Psychological Counseling; and Ethical Norms for Online Psychological Counseling. Psychological research and teaching institutions, as well as local psychological academic and social organizations, are providing psychological services and scientific support for people fighting against epidemic in the front line through psychological hotlines, online psychological counseling, public welfare lectures, popular science articles and other means. The intensity and speed of these actions are unprecedented.

It can be seen that since the 19th National Congress, especially since 10 departments including the National Health Commission and the Central Political and Legal Commission launched the pilot construction of social psychological service system in 2018, the early team cultivation and experience accumulation, and the recent central requirements and deployment are playing a positive role.
2.2. Challenges faced by social psychological services

With the continuous progress of epidemic prevention and control, the challenges faced by the construction of social psychological service system are becoming increasingly apparent, which are mainly reflected in three aspects.

2.2.1. Imperfect relevant laws

At present, there is no social psychological service guarantee mechanism in China’s emergency management system. It is only mentioned in the National Overall Emergency Plan for Public Emergencies that psychological and judicial assistance should be provided to casualties and emergency disposal workers in public emergencies, that is, psychological assistance at the individual level is only mentioned in the emergency plan. The law of the People’s Republic of China on Emergency Response, The Measures for the Administration of Emergency Response Plans, The Regulations on Emergency Response to Public Health Emergencies and The National Emergency plan for Public Health Emergencies do not explicitly involve psychological related contents. The Mental Health Law of the People’s Republic of China requires that the emergency plans formulated by people’s governments at all levels and relevant departments of people’s governments at or above the county level should include the contents of psychological assistance; after an emergency occurs, psychological assistance shall be organized and carried out in accordance with the provisions of the emergency plan.

Psychological services in emergency management should not be limited to psychological assistance at the individual level. With the changes of social basic contradictions, the psychological needs of the people are becoming richer and richer, and the impact of people’s psychology on emergency management and social governance is becoming increasingly prominent. In the epidemic prevention and control, the social psychology of the people affects the prevention and control work in many aspects. The panic buying behavior caused by group panic once faced serious difficulties in the guarantee of basic living materials. Some grass-roots community control measures did not respect people’s basic psychological needs, leading to many conflicts. Over time, groups greatly affected by the epidemic, such as bereavement, industrial injury and unemployment, may cause acute social problems. In China’s existing emergency management system, human resources guarantee, financial guarantee, material guarantee, basic living guarantee, medical and health guarantee, transportation guarantee, public security maintenance, personnel protection, communication guarantee, public facilities and scientific and technological support are closely related to the psychology of the people. The basic mode of the emergency management system with Chinese characteristics in the new era, namely “one case and three systems” (emergency plan, emergency system, emergency mechanism and emergency legal system), is becoming more and more perfect[1]. However, in the emergency management of the epidemic situation, the coordination between psychological services and various emergency support work has not been clarified. In the revision of national emergency management related laws and regulations, we should respect this basic national condition, consider the public psychological impact of various emergency measures, and increase the content of social psychological service guarantee mechanism.

2.2.2. Unclear management system

At present, the management system of the construction of social psychological service system in China is not clear, especially the management of psychological service industry is not in place, and it is impossible to provide services in a timely and orderly manner in emergency management. On November 19, 2018, the National Health Commission, the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, the Publicity Department of the Central Committee, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Ministry
of Justice, the Ministry of Finance, national public complaints and proposals administration, and the China Disabled Persons’ Federation jointly issued the pilot work plan for the construction of the national social psychological service system, requiring that the pilot work be an important starting point for promoting the construction of a safe and healthy China. Each pilot area shall establish and improve a leading group for the construction of social psychological service system headed by the responsible comrades of the party and government, with offices under them and the participation of relevant departments to clarify the responsibilities of member units. At the national level, the National Health Commission and the Central Political and Legal Commission are responsible for the overall coordination of the pilot work. The pilot work plan puts forward specific work indicators for villages (communities), colleges and universities, primary and secondary schools, Party and government organs, enterprises and institutions, medical institutions and professional institutions of social psychological services, including the number of psychological service stations and the work of social psychological services.

Since the pilot was launched, the work of all localities has been advancing. Most regions are led by regional health departments, and some regions are led by regional political and legal committees, other departments cooperate with different degrees, but there is a general difficulty in effective synergy. Social psychological service is a special kind of public service. Standardizing management practitioners is the premise of standardizing industry development and ensuring service quality. According to its rigidity, the demand for social psychological services can be divided into diagnosis and treatment of patients with mental disorders, psychological counseling for people with psychological and behavioral problems, popularization of mental health knowledge and psychological counseling for the general population. According to different professional fields, the providers of social psychological services can be divided into psychiatrists and psychotherapists, psychological counselors, and various psychological service workers who have received psychological education and training. The former is practicing in the medical system with standardized management. The situation of the latter two types of practitioners is complex, and it is urgent for the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, Ministry of civil affairs, Bureau of Industry and Commerce, national Health Commission to strengthen coordination, carry out hierarchical and classified management of practitioners and social psychological service institutions according to professional qualifications, support the society/association to carry out industry self-discipline and professional services, and explore feasible models in the pilot work. Only by realizing the standardized management of social psychological service practitioners and industries under normal conditions can it be possible to timely mobilize professional forces in emergency management and realize “layered, classified and accurate services”.

2.2.3. Unimpeded operation mechanism

The psychosocial service system plays an active role in epidemic prevention and control, but it also clearly exposes the shortcomings of the emergency coordination operation mechanism, which is reflected as a core issue at the level of social governance: how can multiple subjects achieve consultation and co-governance and jointly improve their governance ability. This also highlights the importance of emergency management information system for overall management and cooperation. Government departments, professional institutions, social forces, individuals and organizations receiving services and other multiple subjects need effective communication and cooperation, and work in an orderly manner under the unified leadership of the party and the government. Taking COVID-19 as an example, since the outbreak of the new coronavirus pneumonia, local health organizations, education, civil affairs, civilizations, trade unions, communist youth league, women’s Federation, disabled persons’ federation and other psychological associations and other social organizations were taking action and have supported hundreds of psychological aid hotlines, but there is a phenomenon of repeated construction and
waste of resources due to the lack of unified management. Various hotlines have their own ways, and their professionalism and service ability are uneven. The guidance issued by the health department is not mandatory, and the professional requirements and ethical norms issued by professional institutions can only be implemented by psychological service workers consciously. People do not know which hotline can get high-quality service, and the service quality of the hotline cannot be effectively evaluated.

Psychosocial services are an integral part of public services and they also need to match supply and demand and provide them accurately. In the social psychological service work of fighting the epidemic, the forms of social psychological service resources provided by government departments, psychological professional institutions and social forces are similar, mainly including psychological assistance hotline, online psychological counseling, public welfare online lectures, social media interviews, etc. In addition, in the past two weeks, more than 10 publishing houses have launched various epidemic psychological self-help manuals with similar contents. China has a large population, and different people’s psychological needs varies; in this outbreak, people in different regions, with different demographic characteristics and different degrees of impact have different needs for psychosocial services. The social psychological service resources for epidemic response gathered in a short time need to be provided not only to the public orderly and efficiently, but also to the people in need. In emergency management, how to use information technology and network platform to realize the timely collection and sharing of all kinds of information, as well as service decision-making, realize the accurate connection between psychological service demand and psychological service resources, and realize the steady-state implementation and close connection between normal emergency drill and emergency is also an urgent work to be strengthened.

3. Experience and References at Home and Abroad

The construction of social psychological service system is gradually proposed and formed based on China’s national conditions and practice. It is a measure in line with China’s reality, with Chinese characteristics and adapted to China’s system. It is a complete psychological service system covering all levels of individual, organization, society and culture[2]. The social psychological service system is a multi-level structure, which provides targeted psychological services according to the different needs of different groups, including not only the psychological crisis intervention and longer-term psychological assistance for individuals after emergencies, but also the psychological consultation for individuals in normal life, the mental health education and scientific knowledge popularization for the general population, as well as the social psychological counseling and social mentality shaping at a more macro level.

There are some good international experiences to be used for reference, especially the psychological assistance after disaster. After natural disasters such as earthquakes and typhoons, as well as the impact of man-made disasters like terrorist events and wars, the disaster psychological assistance system in developed countries has become increasingly perfect and mature. Many developed countries have formulated corresponding regulations and laws for disaster prevention, defined the organization and service content, incorporated it into the emergency plan, and established a national disaster psychological assistance system[3].

3.1. Emergency management psychological service legislation

In the legislation of emergency management, developed countries not only clearly stipulate the work of psychological assistance, but also fully consider the psychological impact and psychological services in various psychological related measures of emergency management. Japan is a country prone to natural disasters. As early as 1961, it issued the Basic Law on Disaster Countermeasures to establish a relatively complete legal system for
disaster prevention and reduction, which clearly stipulates the important position and implementation strategy of psychological assistance in post disaster emergency management. After the east Japan earthquake in 2011, the U.S. government restructured the emergency management system, issued Presidential Policy No. 8 Directive, formed an emergency management system guided by the construction of core competence of emergency management, established the emergency management concept of “whole society participation”, and issued a series of management documents to ensure the standardization, regularization and operability of the emergency management system. Among the core competence indicators, many indicators are directly related to psychological construction at the individual and social levels, such as communication behavior, cooperative behavior, community resilience, health and social services, distress management services, etc.[4].

3.2. Emergency management psychological service organization

Psychological services in emergency management are closely related to the psychological needs of emergency management, including not only emergency psychological crisis intervention for directly affected people, but also targeted services for different psychological needs of all kinds of people. It not only needs legislative guarantee, but also defines the organization of emergency management psychological assistance to ensure effective implementation. The main administrative departments related to emergency management psychological assistance in the United States are the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Among them, the Federal Emergency Management Agency is in charge of psychological assistance and is directly responsible to the president. Official disaster psychological assistance is included in the Federal Emergency Plan (FRP), including 12 emergency support functions. Among them, post-disaster psychological services belong to the eighth function “public health and medical treatment”, which is led and presided over by the public health service system of the Ministry of Health and Public Services.

3.3. Construction of emergency management psychological service team

The general situation in the world is that the government, as the main body of emergency management, organizes the construction of emergency management psychological service team. Some international organizations (such as the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children’s Fund) provide support, supervision and monitoring in professional teams and professional services through the issuance of work guidelines, international cooperation and cooperation between government and non-governmental institutions.

The construction of professional emergency rescue volunteer team in Germany has its own characteristics, which is worth learning from. Germany’s emergency rescue force consists of three parts: the Government Fire Department, the Technical Rescue Association under the Federal Technical Rescue Agency and five volunteer organizations, namely, the government, professional associations and social forces.

The three rescue forces have a clear division of labor for the types of frequent disasters in Germany, and the volunteers cover all professional fields of emergency management, including psychological services. This is a large-scale and highly professional team with grid-based distribution in German states, counties, cities and towns, and responds quickly. The German Federal Law on Technical Rescue Volunteers and other laws issued by Germany clarify the rights and obligations of volunteers in emergency rescue. Germany’s Civil Protection and Disaster Relief Law and other laws clarify that governments at all levels are the leading force in the construction of emergency rescue volunteer team, and clarify the fund investment mode of federal government, state government and social donations in the construction of volunteer team; during emergency rescue, professional rescue forces at all levels shall be coordinated and dispatched through a unified emergency command platform.
according to the disaster scale, scope of the impact and degree of harm. Under normal circumstances, Germany attaches great importance to the professional training of volunteer teams and the construction of reserve teams\(^5\).

At present, there is no professional psychological assistance team at the national level in China. In the 13\(^{th}\) Five-Year Plan for Emergency Medical Rescue (2016-2020) issued by the former National Health and Family Planning Commission, it is required to strengthen the construction of emergency psychological assistance teams at all levels, but it is not clear how to build them. After the Wenchuan earthquake, the Institute of psychology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences led the establishment of the national psychological assistance alliance, explored the construction mode of emergency management psychological assistance team, accumulated valuable experience in the formation of team and professional and standardized training of team, and played an important role after many emergencies in recent years. In March 2019, the Institute of psychology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, together with the China Earthquake Emergency Search and Rescue Center of the Ministry of Emergency Management, held the first phase of psychological first aid training for national rescue teams, aiming to further improve the internationalization, specialization and standardization of disaster management and humanitarian rescue in China. However, compared with the mature system in Germany, the construction of emergency management psychological assistance team in China not only lacks legal guarantee, does not specify the competent government department, does not have the support of special government funds, but also does not closely combine it with the construction of professional team of social psychological services under normal conditions.

3.4. Construction of emergency management psychological service information system and network platform

Effective information communication and information sharing can play an important role in cross departmental emergency coordination and is an important premise to ensure the smooth operation mechanism. In this epidemic, many international and domestic institutions and organizations used big data technology to study and judge the development of the epidemic and provide suggestions for emergency management. The national Emergency Response Law requires the establishment of a unified emergency information system, which should include the psychological service information system, and provide accurate information of psychological service needs and psychological service resources for emergency management decisions. In addition, the construction of psychological service network platform is also indispensable. It can play a positive role in serving macro decision-making, guiding public opinion communication, and directly serving people in need.

The novel coronavirus pneumonia epidemic spread rapidly, psychological services for epidemic response mainly through psychological aid hotline and network platform. This is also the embodiment of psychological service network platform to play an active role. Taking the mental health service platform developed by the Institute of psychology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences\(^1\) as an example, it includes psychological self-test, popular science knowledge, psychological self-help methods, psychological counseling and other modules, which can not only understand and collect people’s psychological needs, but also provide direct services for people in need. The platform is currently open to employees of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, their families and students, with more than 10,000 clicks on the first day of opening.

\(^{1}\)https://zkyxjkfw.psych.ac.cn/.

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4. Policy Recommendations

The social psychological service system is a system with effective coordination and efficient cooperation among various departments and organizations under the leadership of Party committees and governments at all levels on the basis of accurately grasping the psychological needs of the people; it is to provide targeted psychological services for individuals and organizations through public policies, public services and other means at the individual, organizational, social and cultural levels, while fully mobilizing the enthusiasm of social forces[6]. The construction of social psychological service system requires not only the construction in normal society, but also the construction in emergency management. For the emergency management of emergencies such as epidemic prevention and control, this paper puts forward five suggestions on further strengthening the construction of social psychological service system.

4.1. Give full play to the role of existing psychosocial service resources in epidemic response

Local health departments and political and legal commissions took the lead to formulate the work plan of social and psychological services to deal with the epidemic as soon as possible, which was included in the overall deployment of epidemic prevention and control, overall arrangement and coordinated promotion. The work plan shall reflect the objectives of classified intervention, accurate policy implementation, relieving pressure and maintaining stability, and form detailed work tasks in combination with the actual situation of all localities. We should focus on providing psychological services for front-line medical staff in the fight against the epidemic, and provide long-term psychological assistance for people seriously affected by the epidemic for no less than one year. We should fully mobilize the enthusiasm of local mental health and mental health expert teams and social psychological service institutions, publicize mental health knowledge through various channels, guide scientific and rational understanding, improve mental health literacy, and guide public opinion for the restoration of economic and social order.

4.2. Incorporate social psychological services into the emergency management laws and regulations system

Legislative bodies and emergency management departments should speed up the revision of emergency management laws and regulations and timely revise the emergency response law; increase the monitoring and early warning of people’s risk perception in the emergency monitoring and early warning; increase the emergency measures of psychological crisis intervention for the directly affected people in the emergency disposal and rescue, and include individual long-term psychological assistance and social psychological services at the group level into the recovery and reconstruction plan in the post recovery and reconstruction. Governments at all levels shall add independent psychosocial service guarantee plans to the emergency plans for emergencies, clarify the competent departments and coordination departments, and clarify the requirements for fund guarantee and daily drills. The social psychological service security plan should follow the principle of paying equal attention to psychological service, short-term intervention and long-term service.

4.3. Strengthen industry management and build a professional team of social and psychological services for emergency management

Local Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, Ministry of Civil Affairs, Bureau of Industry and
Commerce, Health Commission and other departments should strengthen coordination, standardize the management of various psychosocial service practitioners and service institutions, and carry out hierarchical and classified management according to professional qualifications. On this basis, referring to the experience of the construction of professional emergency rescue volunteer team in Germany, and based on the three administrative levels of the state, province (autonomous region, municipality directly under the central government) and prefecture level administrative region, the professional volunteer team of social psychological service and guarantee of emergency management shall be established respectively. The members include psychiatrists, professionals in the fields of mental health and social work, so as to form a professional volunteer team that can carry out intervention at different levels and classifications. The management and training of professional teams in peacetime and wartime. Give full play to the role of social forces and guide the social resources of psychological services to play a positive role in a standardized and orderly manner.

4.4. Strengthen the construction of information system to provide guarantee for the efficient operation of emergency management

In the emergency management information system, governments at all levels should increase the information collection and regulation of psychological service needs and resources, including social psychological service team resources, technical resources, regional distribution of resources and other information; in addition, it should be combined with other material support information, regularly updated under normal conditions, and directly invoked in emergency response to support comprehensive research and judgment. In emergency response and reconstruction, make full use of the information platform to realize the accurate connection and refined management of psychosocial service needs and resources. According to the characteristics of emergencies, make good use of technologies and platforms such as psychological assistance hotline and online psychological services.

4.5. Strengthen psychological research on emergency management

In the essence, the construction of social governance system, national emergency management system and social psychological service system is human behavior-system construction is human behavior, and system implementation is to have an impact on human behavior. To strengthen and improve national governance, we should focus on the people and fully respect the people’s psychological characteristics and needs in the construction of the governance system. After more than 100 years of development, scientific psychology has played an important supporting role in improving people’s mental health and promoting the harmonious and stable development of society; it also has rich research achievements in the field of emergency management, such as the earlier research on psychological intervention for disaster victims, the research on risk decision-making of managers, the research on public risk perception, safety psychology, disaster psychology and other subdisciplines[7]. When formulating the 14th five-year plan and medium and long-term development plan, relevant departments should pay full attention to the scientific research and talent training of emergency management and social psychological services, so as to provide scientific support and talent reserve for improving the governance system, improving governance efficiency and improving governance ability.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.
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