AB012. 'Care for Our Future Scholars': prevalence and psychosocial correlates of mental health of mainland Chinese PhD students in Hong Kong

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Background: Ph.D. students' prevalence of depression is high. International Ph.D. students' mental health should not be overlooked as well. According to the Education and Life Transition (ELT) model, international Ph.D. students usually go through transitions both from academic and acculturation lives. Unsuccessful transitions may cause stress and harm the psychological well-being of these academic sojourners. Mainland Ph.D. students occupy the largest population of non-local research postgraduate students in Hong Kong. As a special case of internal migration in China, they are at risk of suffering from poor mental health but remain understudied. This study aimed to assess the prevalence and characteristics of mental health problems (depression) among mainland Chinese Ph.D. students in Hong Kong and examine the major psychosocial risk factors.

Methods: An online cross-sectional survey was conducted with 511 full-time mainland Ph.D. students in Hong Kong. Participants were invited to complete questionnaires measuring their depression (DASS-21), psychosocial (perceived academic stress, acculturative stress, and social support) and demographic variables.

Results: The prevalence of probable depression was 30.9%. Multivariate logistic regression analysis revealed that higher perceived academic (ORs =1.66–2.49) and acculturative stress (ORs =1.09–1.20), lower perceived social support (ORs =0.39–0.68), lower perceived English proficiency (ORs =0.52–0.71), living in the county (OR =7.91) and village (OR =8.38) (*vs.* city), coming from Northeastern (OR =8.78) and Western China (OR =12.78) (*vs.* Eastern China) were associated with greater risk of probable depression. Unexpectedly, risk predictors also included higher perceived Cantonese proficiency (OR =1.86), religious beliefs (OR =9.58) and acculturation experience (OR =2.91) (all Ps<0.05).

Conclusions: The prevalence of probable depression among mainland Ph.D. students in Hong Kong is high. The economic development level positively predicts the psychological well-being of Chinese academic internal migrants. Universities may pay more attention to students from less-developed regions and care for their psychological needs. Practitioners may consider organizing stress-reducing activities and providing more social support for these students.

Keywords: Mental health; Chinese PhD student; prevalence; psychosocial correlates

Footnote

Conflicts of Interest: Both authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Ethical Statement: The authors are accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.