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UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTS OF DAILY STRESS ON SINGLE ADULTS IN CHINA

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Abstract:

During the three-year duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in China have experienced decline in revenues or had to cease operations. Due to the decline in employment opportunities, individuals feel obligated to improve their level of work intensity and pace to maintain existing job opportunities. It is necessary to understand the current social context as well as the various forms and origins of stress among Chinese adults in order to alleviate their daily psychological pressure. This study is part of a larger study in developing happy toys to reduce adults' stress through passive approach. This paper presents a comprehensive literature review that delves into the social context of China, the various sources of daily stress experienced by Chinese adults, and the consequential effects of such stress on their well-being. Sources of daily stress encompass economic pressure, social isolation, traditional social and cultural pressures, work-related stress, and challenges associated with social ageing, both for men and women. However, societal recognition of the psychological pressure experienced by adults has been inadequate. The findings of this study underscore the correlation between prolonged exposure to stress and the development of various health issues, including insomnia, anxiety, depression, and a range of both physical and mental health conditions, such as compromised immune function. Following an introduction to contextual factors, this article will explore the potential correlation between happy toy and their ability to mitigate the various stressors encountered in an individual's daily life. The study aims to explore potential pairings of happy toy as a means to alleviate an individual's daily stressors. This study aims to document the various factors that contribute to the experience of daily stress among single adults in China. Additionally, it seeks to identify the underlying theoretical framework that can inform the development of happy toy specifically designed for Chinese adults with the purpose of alleviating daily stress.

Keywords:

Chinese Single Adults, Social Background, Sources Of Daily Stress, Effects Of Daily Stress, Built Environment Informatics

Introduction

Due to the impact of COVID-19 and the implementation of restrictive measures over a three-year period, a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are on the verge of closure. In addition, the closure of factories has led to a significant increase in the unemployment rate among adults Li et al. (2021). In recent years, the growth of China's gross domestic product (GDP) has decelerated. The current economic downturn has caused a decline in employers' revenues, forcing them to implement cost-cutting measures such as increasing employee workloads and working hours. However, adults in the workplace are subjected to increased pressure due to the increased pace and intense workload despite receiving relatively lower compensation, resulting in an increasing amount of stress. There is a growing trend among Chinese adults to work longer hours and assume greater responsibilities in order to safeguard their existing employment Ma et al. (2021). Compared to other demographic groups, single adults in China face a greater number of stress-inducing factors, including financial burdens, social isolation, adherence to traditional social and cultural norms, and occupational demands Wang et al. (2022). Both the physical and mental health of an individual can be negatively impacted by prolonged exposure to stress. Therefore, it is essential to understand the impact of daily stress on single adults in China. In order to promote the psychological health and social integration of this population, it is essential to gain insight into the effects of daily stress on them.

In addition, the implementation of the one-child policy has exacerbated the problem of China's ageing population. The increase in women's educational attainment has led to the emergence of a growing number of women who reject societal norms such as marriage and other traditional constraints. However, these obstacles have led to an increase in the number of Chinese adults choosing a single lifestyle and experiencing increased daily pressures. There is an urgent need for Chinese society to devote more resources to addressing the physical and mental health challenges faced by adults, with a focus on single adults Foguet and García (2020). Insomnia, anxiety, depression, and a weakened immune system can result from prolonged exposure to chronic stress, which can have adverse effects on both physical and mental health, significantly affecting the happiness index of single adults in China and disrupting public social health and social stability Leger and Bayon (2010).

Therefore, this study intends to examine the stress experienced by single adults within the context of contemporary Chinese society, focusing on its effects on the physical and mental health of Chinese adults. In addition, the potential impact of daily stress on adult life satisfaction will be investigated towards developing effective stress-relieving interventions for them.

Literature Review

Social Background of Daily Stress

Numerous scholarly investigations have examined the origins of stress experienced by single adults in China as well as the societal circumstances surrounding these stressors that exert an influence on them. These stressors encompass the imposition of lockdown measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional educational structures, parental or societal expectations for marriage, financial instability, unemployment, and diminished levels of social satisfaction.

Amidst the COVID-19 lockdown measures, adults across the globe encountered heightened levels of stress and anxiety. Wang and Zou (2022) emphasise the severe repercussions that the three-year COVID-19 lockdown had on the psychological well-being of Chinese adults, persisting even during the post-pandemic period. According to Wechsler et al. (2022) the absence of happiness constitutes a significant factor contributing to the experience of stress and anxiety.

In contrast to their male counterparts, female adults exhibit a higher propensity for experiencing mental health issues. In a recent study conducted by Tahara et al. (2021), it was observed that there is a positive correlation between reduced social contact and diminished psychological endurance among women, which in turn increases their vulnerability to stress and mental health disorders. According to Gui (2020), single women frequently experience pressure from their family of origin as well as societal expectations regarding marriage, education, and other traditional norms. These external factors exert a significant influence on their daily lives.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that employment and income are significant determinants that contribute to mental stress and subsequently increase the likelihood of depression among adults in China. According to Wang and Zou (2022), there is a notable emphasis on the heightened susceptibility of young individuals who are unemployed to experience elevated levels of stress and anxiety, ultimately placing them at increased vulnerability for the development of mental health disorders. In their study, Ma et al. (2021) posited that the prevalence of smoking and alcohol abuse among Chinese adults exhibited an upward trend subsequent to the COVID-19 pandemic, which can be attributed to the impact of psychological stress. Based on the study conducted by Otsuka et al. (2022), it was observed that China's one-child policy had the additional effect of augmenting the economic strain and psychological distress of contemporary Chinese adults.

According to Lu Peng et al. (2021), the closure of SMEs in China was attributed to a decrease in income and the inability to resume employment. The closure of factories resulted in a loss of employment opportunities for adults. Hua and Ma (2022) assert that unemployed adults experience heightened levels of stress, frustration, and social stigma. The combination of elevated employment pressure and limited social support has been found to be associated with diminished levels of life satisfaction. In addition, Li et al. (2021) underscored the impact of low income and life stress on the quality of sleep. Based on the findings of Grandner et al. (2010), unemployed adults who possess a low household income, particularly those who are divorced, experience more severe symptoms of insomnia. Plus, the study revealed that single women tend to exhibit the most severe manifestations of insomnia.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that there are multiple factors that contribute to stress. Regrettably, the current level of societal awareness regarding these stressors is insufficient, and as a result, these pressures persist over extended periods of time, posing detrimental effects on the overall physical and mental well-being of adults. In essence, the primary factors contributing to the daily stress experienced by single adults in China can be attributed to the implementation of lockdown measures amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, disruptions to traditional education structures, parental or societal pressures to consider marriage, reduced economic income and unemployment rates, as well as a decline in overall social satisfaction. It is recommended that society implement rational intervention strategies for addressing this phenomenon.

Sources of Daily Stress

The physical and mental well-being of adults has been influenced by a variety of factors, including adverse childhood experiences, social income inequality, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and increased life stress. These stressors manifest in various ways, such as negative emotions, tobacco and alcohol abuse, sleeping disorders, anxiety, and depression, among others. The aforementioned issues have resulted in serious threats to the physical and mental well-being of adults in China.

The presence of adverse childhood experiences and challenging living circumstances has been found to be associated with the development of detrimental mental health problems and maladaptive social behaviours during adulthood. As revealed by Khade et al. (2018), the traditional Chinese education model frequently results in parents resorting to violent methods for the purpose of educating their children. Xu et al. (2022) discovered a positive correlation between physical abuse experienced during childhood and the likelihood of engaging in violent behaviour during adolescence. The occurrence of violence and abuse during childhood has a higher propensity to contribute to the development of mental health issues in adulthood. Likewise, Kong et al. (2021) discovered in their study that adverse childhood experiences (ACE), encompassing negative emotional encounters, can potentially lead to detrimental mental health disorders during adulthood, thereby exerting enduring effects on individuals' daily functioning in later life. Based on the findings by Chen et al. (2022), a significant proportion of Chinese adults (35%) reported having encountered at least one instance of abuse during their childhood.

Furthermore, Otsuka et al. (2022) discovered that during periods of economic downturn, there is a notable escalation in daily stress levels, leading to a higher prevalence of insomnia. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among women who are unemployed, divorced, or single. Individuals from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds exhibit a higher susceptibility to experiencing insomnia. Meanwhile, Qiu et al. (2022) observed in their study that substantial work pressure and the adverse emotional effects of working overtime are associated with sleeping disorders and job dissatisfaction among Chinese government employees. Nevertheless, Ypsilanti et al. (2018) reported that individuals suffering from insomnia exhibit a heightened susceptibility to feelings of self-loathing, anxiety, stress, depression, and other related psychological states. This vicious circle has been a persistent issue in the daily routines of adults in China for a considerable period of time. According to Ding et al. (2020), their findings indicate that the prevalence rate of Chinese adults is notably high, reaching 7.23%. This can be attributed to various factors such as increased life pressure, irregular patterns of work and rest, tobacco and alcohol consumption, sleeping disorders, and other related causes.

According to the study conducted by Duan et al. (2022), it was suggested that individuals face heightened susceptibility to infection, mortality, and psychological distress amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. In a study conducted by Ma et al. (2021), it was observed that there was a notable rise in the prevalence of smoking and alcohol consumption among Chinese adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. The confirmation of this assertion was provided through research conducted by Duan et al. (2022) and Deardorff et al. (2023) amidst the lockdown measures implemented in Wuhan city in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both studies observed a notable increase in sleep, weight, anxiety, and depression scores among college students, with a particular emphasis on the disproportionate impact experienced by women. Thorndike et al. (2022) observed a deterioration in mental health symptoms and a substantial rise in depression and anxiety levels among low-income adults in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and various stressors. Based on research by Zheng et al. (2020), single adults with low income and a lack of social support tend to experience elevated levels of daily psychological stress.

In addition, Wang et al. (2022) have highlighted the correlation between stress and the emergence of adverse emotional states, ultimately culminating in the development of depression. Foguet and García (2020) discovered a growing body of evidence supporting the notion that adults with higher levels of stress exhibit an increased susceptibility to the development of major depressive disorder (MDD) and generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) in adulthood. The main factors contributing to psychological stress encompass post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, occupational demands, marital status, financial resources, and mental strain. According to Gao (2019) survey conducted among Chinese universities, it was found that female students exhibit a higher propensity for experiencing anxiety when subjected to similar levels of pressure, stemming from concerns related to body image and physical appearance. In their study, Fan et al. (2021) identified health status, subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and marital status as significant determinants of daily stress.

In contrast to Chinese government employees, adults in other sectors exhibited higher levels of work-related stress, longer working hours, increased sleeping disorders, and a higher prevalence of anxiety symptoms. The presence of companionship and a substantial level of social support can mitigate anxiety among individuals whose work income exhibits greater volatility. Nevertheless, scant attention has been devoted by scholars and social institutions to the everyday stresses experienced by Chinese adults. The detrimental impact of negative emotions and daily stress on the physical and mental well-being of Chinese adults necessitates societal awareness and concern for this phenomenon. This study identified the primary stressors encountered by single adults in China on a daily basis encompass various aspects such as quality of life, financial income, health status, working hours, family expectations, social stigma, and child abuse.

Effects of Daily Stress

When an individual experiences significant levels of stress, the primary reaction often includes symptoms such as insomnia, disrupted eating patterns, and the use of substances such as alcohol or tobacco as coping mechanisms. These behaviours are not conducive to maintaining personal well-being or fostering long-term life progression. The escalation of daily stress has major consequences for individuals, communities, and public health, posing a potential threat to social stability.

The experience of chronic stress elicits emotional responses and exerts detrimental effects on individuals. According to Charles et al. (2013), minor aspects of daily life frequently serve as

triggers for stress, leading to adverse emotional responses and potentially impacting the long-term mental and physical well-being of adults. Dai et al. (2020) have highlighted the association between prolonged stress and the development of chronic stress, adversity, depression, anxiety, and loneliness, among other negative outcomes. Consequently, it can be inferred that unhealthy life stress serves as the primary determinant of chronic stress. As uncovered by Liu et al. (2022), chronic stress has been identified as a potential factor contributing to various health conditions, including insomnia, bowel disease, anxiety, cardiovascular disease, mental disorders, and cancer. In the context of daily existence, emotional responses exert enduring effects on personal health.

In the context of daily stressors, individuals exhibit varying responses to stress, with notable differences observed between men and women. However, it is currently evident that these coping mechanisms are not conducive to promoting optimal physical and mental well-being. According to Chaplin et al. (2008), when faced with significant levels of stress, adult males tend to resort to alcohol consumption as a means of alleviating stress, ultimately leading to an excessive reliance on alcohol. In a study conducted by Long et al. (2021), it was observed that women exhibited a higher propensity to alleviate stress through the consumption of high-sugar beverages and desserts. Also stated by Long et al. (2021), the rapid pace of work and mounting life pressures in China have led to a dietary pattern among Chinese adults characterised by the consumption of fast food that is high in fat, salt, and carbohydrates. The prevalence of an unhealthy lifestyle among Chinese adults, exacerbated by societal pressures, is progressively posing a threat to their personal well-being.

Insomnia is currently acknowledged as a significant public health concern, as indicated by the findings of Zhao et al. (2020), who conducted a survey revealing that a substantial proportion (36.38%) of Chinese adults have experienced stress and anxiety resulting in sleep deprivation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the findings of Ardlie et al. (2020), sleeping disorders have been identified as potential precursors to adult sleep apnoea, obstructive sleep apnoea, and various other conditions that pose significant risks to both life and overall well-being. Some individuals even resort to drug interventions as a means of addressing stress and insomnia. Ruisoto and Contador (2019) emphasised the societal implications of stress-induced substance abuse, while Léger and Bayon (2010) underlined the severe effect of insomnia on various domains, including social-economic factors, work productivity, public safety, public health, quality of life, and social well-being. The study conducted by Labaran et al. (2022) revealed that sleep was primarily influenced by two key factors: working beyond 41 hours per week and experiencing work-related stress. Unsurprisingly, it is worth noting that Chinese adults tend to engage in work for durations exceeding 41 hours per week. This prolonged work schedule, coupled with insufficient sleep and the presence of work-related stress, has been observed to have adverse effects on both productivity and overall happiness.

The correlation between societal stability and individuals' profound sense of happiness is inseparable; however, an excessive amount of pressure is not conducive to the enhancement of individuals' happiness. Nitschke and Bartz (2023) underscored the significance of stress-induced repercussions on individuals, positing that such effects can engender a broader prevalence of stress and negative emotions, thereby exerting an influence on social stability. Based on the findings of Jiang et al. (2021), contemporary stressors frequently stem from experiences of frustration, whereas Jackson (2014) argues that individuals who experience elevated levels of social pressure tend to exhibit lower levels of life satisfaction. The presence of an overwhelming amount of stress poses a significant risk to individuals' physical and

mental well-being, as well as their overall sense of happiness. Prolonged exposure to stress has been found to have a substantial impact on the occurrence of societal unrest and instability. Therefore, the mitigation of daily stress among adults has significant ramifications for promoting social stability.

It is important to note that a significant number of scholars may not fully realise the impact of daily stress on the overall physical and mental well-being of adults, thereby contributing to the emergence of public health concerns. Stress is widely recognised as the predominant catalyst for generating negative “energy.” The absence of happiness and the increased presence of negative social emotions are not conducive to the maintenance of social stability. Prolonged and persistent stress experienced on a daily basis has been associated with various adverse effects on cognitive functions, memory, moods, self-esteem, and sleep; it can also increase cancer risk as well as influence alcoholism and substance abuse.

Research Methodology

The present study employs the “Systematic Literature Review Synthesis Process” as described by Ibrahim and Mustafa Kamal (2018) in Masiran et al. (2020) in order to identify relevant literature and establish a theoretical basis for the generation of research ideas. This study’s typology has been recognised in the field of literature review (Rousseau, Manning, & Denyer, 2008; Yu & Watson, 2019; Templier & Paré, 2015). It involves the categorisation of research questions into three constructs: “who,” “what,” and “how,” which define the element being influenced, the knowledge required to solve the problem, and the anticipated impact of the study (Ibrahim, 2011 & 2020).

The study commenced by defining keywords pertaining to Chinese single adults, their social background, factors contributing to their daily stress, the effects of such stress, and the field of built environment informatics. Through exhaustive searches of the Google Scholar and Scopus databases, a total of 105 articles were identified. Following a comprehensive evaluation, 46 articles were eventually selected for further examination and subjected to a comprehensive critical review. The study examined the abstracts of the selected articles, and the researchers used the Point of Departure (POD) Tree Diagram to synthesise and summarise selected articles with high potential for future utility (Ibrahim & Mustafa Kamal, 2018). Documentation of the synthesis process was conducted using the online EAGLE System.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of daily stress on single adults in China, employing a systematic literature review synthesis methodology within the context of single Chinese adults. This study revealed that various social factors contribute to the experience of daily stress among single Chinese adults, which include gender imbalance, adherence to traditional cultural norms, engaging in high-intensity overtime work, facing low income and high prices, experiencing regional development disparities, and the impact of women's higher education. The study also identified several key sources of daily stress experienced by single adults in China, including quality of life, financial income, health status, working hours, financial income, family expectations, social stigma, and childhood abuse. Moreover, this study discovered that chronic daily stress had been associated with Various adverse effects, including cognitive impairment, memory loss, negative moods, self-deprecation, insomnia, increased cancer risk, engagement in alcohol and smoking behaviors, and heightened susceptibility to depression and anxiety. This present study thus proposes the development of happy toy for adults as a means to alleviate daily stress. Figure 1 depicts a

comprehensive point of departure (POD) tree diagram that elucidates the various sources of stress and the intricate processes of influence experienced by Chinese single adults. Figure 2 illustrates the conceptual framework. The creation of happy toy was motivated by the aim of alleviating the daily stress experienced by single adults in China, as shown in Figure 2.

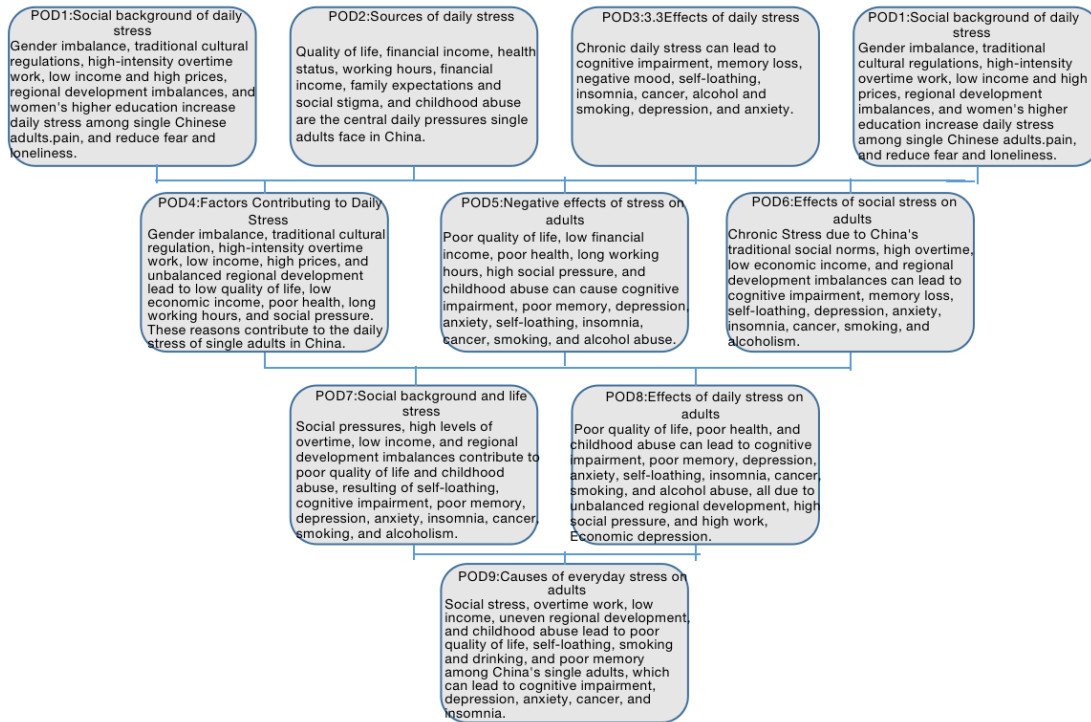


Figure 1: Point of Departure (POD) Tree Diagram for Studying on single Chinese adults (Adapted from Ibrahim and Mustafa Kamal, 2018)

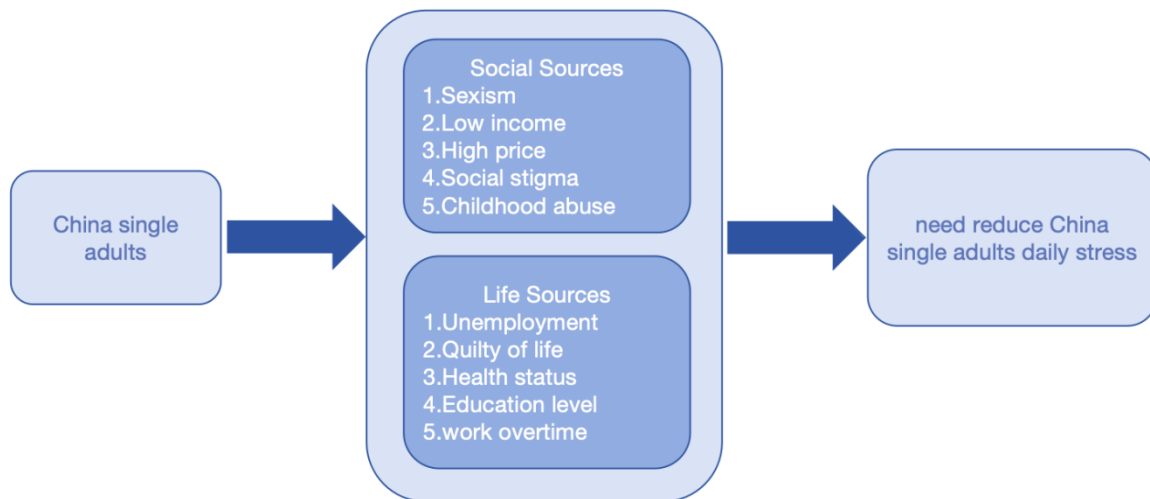


Figure 2: Proposed Conceptual Framework based on single Chinese adults (Adapted from Ibrahim and Mustafa Kamal, 2018)

Conclusion

This study found a combination of factors, including social stress, excessive work hours, inadequate income, regional development disparities, and experiences of childhood abuse, contribute to a diminished quality of life, self-deprecation, engagement in smoking and alcohol consumption, as well as impaired memory among single adults in China. These factors, in turn, can potentially result in cognitive impairment, depression, anxiety, susceptibility to cancer, and sleep disorders like insomnia etc. The findings are significant as they contribute to developing happy toys for single adults in China based on the identified criteria. Future studies include matching the stress-related criteria with appropriate happy toy interventions.

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