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**Urgently Needed Construction of Public Psychological Service System in Emergency Management**

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Urgently Needed Construction of Public Psychological Service System in Emergency Management

Abstract
COVID-19 outbreak not only affects individuals' physical and mental health, but also influences on the government trust, interpersonal trust, risk communication, economic confidence, consumer behavior, social mentality, and other social psychological behaviors. Accordingly, the construction of public psychological service system is required to be strengthened in the national emergency management system. Our corresponding suggestions are as follows. First, revise the national emergency response law in a timely manner in order to incorporate the public psychological service system into the emergency management system. Second, establish a professional emergency service team consisting of psychological service professionals and guide social organizations to play their roles in an orderly manner. Third, construct an information management system and network platforms to realize the precise docking and the good management of public psychological service demand as well as resources in emergency management. Fourth, support psychological research on the emergency management that provides the knowledge accumulation and the scientific support for perfecting the emergency management system, improve its efficiency and strengthen the emergency management capacity.

Keywords
public health events; emergency management; public psychological services

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Urgently Needed Construction of Public Psychological Service System in Emergency Management

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Abstract: COVID-19 outbreak not only affects individuals’ physical and mental health, but also influences the government trust, interpersonal trust, risk communication, economic confidence, consumer behavior, social mentality, and other social psychological behaviors. Accordingly, the construction of public psychological service system needs to be strengthened in the national emergency management system. Our corresponding suggestions are as follows. First, national emergency response law should be revised in a timely manner in order to incorporate the public psychological service system into the emergency management system. Second, professional emergency service team consisting of psychological service professionals should be established to guide social organizations to play their roles in an orderly manner. Third, information management system and network platforms should be constructed to realize the precise docking and good management of public psychological service demand and resources in emergency management. Fourth, psychological research on the emergency management should be enhanced to provide knowledge accumulation and scientific support for perfecting the emergency management system and improving emergency management efficiency and capacity. DOI: 10.16418/j.issn.1000-3045.20200213001-en

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1 Status quo and challenges

Individual and public psychological demands, often interwoven with life safety, material pursuit, and interests appeal, affect the pandemic control and post-pandemic reconstruction, even the economic and social development. People’s aspiration for a good life and the degree of public civilization is more manifested in psychological security than emergency response at the material level. Accordingly, psychological construction should be valued in the pandemic control as well as the national emergency management and social governance.

1.1 Performance of public psychological services in pandemic control

Compared with the public psychological services for the outbreak of SARS and Wenchuan earthquake, those for COVID-19 pandemic have made much headway. The promotion of the public psychological service system has begun to take effect. In response to COVID-19, the State Council of the People’s Republic of China has issued a series of joint prevention and control measures, including Notice on Printing and Distributing Instructions on Emergent Psychological Crisis Intervention against COVID-19 released on January 27, 2020, Notice on Setting Psychological Assistance Hotline.

Meanwhile, China’s psychology circle also takes active and prompt steps. Chinese Psychological Society (CPS), Chinese Association of Social Psychology (CASP), China Association for Mental Health (CAMH), etc. released proposals as soon as possible, and jointly issued Guide for Network Psychological Assistance Services against COVID-19 on February 12, 2020. The Registration Work Committee of Clinic Psychology of CPS promptly launched Tiered and Staged Counter-COVID-19 Psychological Assistance, Guide for Network Psychological Counseling against COVID-19, Ethic Norms for Hotline Psychological Counseling, and Ethic Norms for Network Psychological Counseling. Psychological research and teaching institutions as well as academic organizations and private agencies regarding psychology in various regions are offering psychological services and scientific support for the fight against COVID-19 through psychological hotline, online psychological counseling, commonweal lectures, science popularization articles, etc. The intensity and speed of these actions are unprecedented.

It can be seen that since the 19th National Congress of the CPC, especially the initiation of the pilot work of the promotion of public psychological service system by the National Health Commission of the People’s Republic of China, Commission for Political and Legal Affairs of the CPC Central Committee, and other eight departments in 2018, the experience of team building at the early stage and the central government’s recent requirement and deployment are taking positive effects.

### 1.2 Challenges of public psychological services

As COVID-19 control furthers, the promotion of public psychological service system faces increasingly prominent challenges, which are manifested in the following three aspects.

#### 1.2.1 Unsound relevant laws

So far, there has been no mechanism guaranteeing public psychological services in China’s emergency management system. It is only mentioned in the National Contingency Plan for Public Emergencies that psychological and judicial assistance should be provided to casualties and emergency response personnel in public emergencies. That is, psychological assistance at the individual level is only mentioned in the contingency plan. No definite psychological content is mentioned in Emergency Response Law of the People’s Republic of China, Contingency Plan for Emergencies, Regulations on Preparedness for and Response to Emergent Health Hazards, and National Contingency Plan for Public Health Emergencies. It is prescribed in Mental Health Law of the People’s Republic of China that the emergency plans formulated by the people’s governments at all levels and the relevant departments of the people’s governments at or above the county level shall contain content of psychological assistance. In case of any emergency, the people’s government fulfilling the unified leadership responsibility or organizing the disposal of emergencies shall, in accordance with the specific circumstances of the emergency, organize psychological assistance under the emergency plan.

Psychological services in the emergency management system should not be confined to psychological assistance at the individual level. Given the shift of basic social conflicts and contradictions, people are eager to gain access to diversified psychological services. Public psychology has an increasingly important effect on emergency management and social governance. Public psychology affects the prevention and control of the pandemic in multiple aspects. Public panic buying once almost paralyzed daily substance supply. Some control measures by grass-roots community, without taking into account people’s psychological needs, have caused quite a few conflicts. With the passage of time, groups seriously affected by the pandemic, such as the bereaved, the injured at work, and the unemployed, may trigger acute social problems. In China’s existing emergency management system, human resources, financial resources, materials, basic living substance, medical and health care, transportation, public security, personnel protection, communication, public facilities, and scientific and technological support are all closely related to public psychology. In the new era, much progress has been made in the emergency management system with Chinese characteristics consisting of emergency preparedness program, contingency regime, contingency mechanism, and contingency law [1]. However, in the emergency management in response to the pandemic, the synergy between psychological services and emergency guarantee remains blurry. Relevant rules and regulations concerning national emergency management should take into account this concrete national reality in their amendments, as well as the public psychological effect of various contingency measures, and the content of the mechanism guaranteeing public psychological services should be also added.

#### 1.2.2 Ambiguity in the management system

At present, the management system for the construction of China’s public psychological service system is not well-defined. In particular, the management of the psychological service industry is not in place, so psychological services cannot be provided in a timely and orderly manner. On November 19, 2018, National Health Commission of the People’s Republic of China, Commission for Political and Legal Affairs of the CPC Central Committee, Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, Ministry of Public Security of the People’s Republic of China, Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, Ministry of Justice of the People’s Republic of China, Ministry of Finance of the People’s Republic of China, National Public Complaints and
Proposals Administration, and China Disabled Persons’ Federation jointly issued Scheme for Pilot Work of the Construction of National Public Psychological Service System, which stipulates that the pilot work should serve as the pillar for promoting Peaceful China and Healthy China. Each pilot area should establish and improve a leading group for the construction of a public psychological service system headed by the Party and government officials, with sub-offices established and concerned departments participating, and should define the responsibilities of affiliated organizations. At the national level, the National Health Commission of the People’s Republic of China and Commission for Political and Legal Affairs of the CPC Central Committee are responsible for the overall coordination of the pilot work. Specific work indicators are stipulated in the pilot work plan for villages (communities), institutions of higher learning and primary and secondary schools, Party and government organs, enterprises and institutions, medical institutions, and professional public psychological service institutions, including the number of psychological service stations and the work of public psychological services.

Since the start of the pilot project, work has been advancing in local regions. Mostly, it is led by regional health departments. In some regions, it is the regional political and legal affairs commission that takes the lead. Other departments play a supporting role of different degrees. However, it is generally difficult for various departments to effectively coordinate with each other. Public psychological service is a special kind of public service. Standardized personnel management is the premise to standardize the development of the industry and ensure the quality of service. According to the degree of rigid demand, public psychological services involve diagnosis and treatment for patients with mental disorders, psychological counseling for people inflicted by psychological and behavioral problems, popularization of mental health knowledge, and psychological counseling for ordinary people. Those providing public psychological services consist of psychiatrists and psychotherapists, psychological consultants, and various psychological service workers with background of psychological education and training. Psychiatrists and psychotherapists work in the medical system practicing standardized management. The case of psychological consultants and various psychological service workers is complicated. Therefore, it is urgent for the departments of human resources and social security, civil affairs, industry and commerce, and health to strengthen coordination, carry out classified management of practitioners and public psychological service institutions according to their professional qualifications, encourage industry self-discipline and professional services among societies/associations, and explore feasible models for the pilot work. Only with standardized regular management of practitioners of public psychological services and the industry can it be possible to mobilize professional forces in time and realize “tiered classification and targeted service” in emergency management.

1.2.3 Unsmooth operation mechanism

The public psychological service system plays a positive role in pandemic prevention and control, which however obviously exposes the deficiencies of emergency coordination and operation. In this case, a core issue of public governance arises: How to realize consultation and common governance among multiple players and jointly enhance governance capacity. This also highlights the importance of emergency management information system in coordinated management, collaboration and cooperation. Governmental departments, professional agencies, non-governmental forces, individuals and organizations receiving services, and others need communicate and cooperate effectively, and carry out work in an orderly manner under the unified leadership of the Party and the government. An example of psychological assistance hotlines: Since the outbreak of COVID-19, departments such as health, education, civil affairs, office of civil enhancement, trade unions, communist youth league, women’s federations, disabled persons’ federations, and psychology-related societies and associations have been taking actions and helped establishing hundreds of psychological assistance hotlines. However, there lacks unified management and appears duplication of labor and waste of resources. All kinds of hotlines go their own way, with uneven professionalism and service competence. The guiding opinions issued by the health department are not mandatory, and the professional requirements and ethical norms issued by professional institutions are only implemented ethically by psychological service workers. People in need are unclear about which hotline can provide professional psychological service, and the service quality of the hotline fails to be effectively evaluated at the same time.

Public psychological service, as an integral part of public service, should provide well-targeted supply matching demand. While combating COVID-19, governmental departments, professional psychological institutions, and non-governmental forces offer public psychological services in similar forms, which mainly consist of psychological assistance hotlines, online psychological counseling, online commonweal lectures, non-governmental media interviews, etc. In addition, in about two weeks more than ten publishing houses have launched various anti-COVID-19 psychological self-help manuals with similar content. China is populous where different groups of people exhibit different psychological demands. In this pandemic, difference in psychological demands comes from difference in region, demographic feature, and degree of impact. The public psychological services gathered within a short time in response to COVID-19 should be supplied to the public in an orderly and effective manner. Besides, the supply should target the people in need. It is also essential to step up efforts on how to use information technology and network platform in emergency management
to realize the timely collection and sharing of all kinds of information, as well as service decision-making, the precise docking between psychological service needs and psychological service resources, and integration between regular drills and emergency response.

2 Experience in China and abroad

The public psychological service system, grounded in China’s national conditions and practice, conforms to China’s concrete context, bears its own characteristics, and adapts itself to China’s regime. It is a system integrating individuals, organizations, society, and culture [2]. The public psychological service system, as a multi-layered framework, provides targeted services, including not only individual-specific psychological intervention and long-term psychological assistance but also individual psychological counseling, public psychological education, and science knowledge popularization, as well as public psychological persuasion and social mentality modeling at the macro level.

With regard to public psychological services in response to the outbreak of emergencies, there is some international experience worth learning from, especially post-disaster psychological assistance. Developed countries have a fully-fledged psychological disaster-relieved system in response to natural disasters like earthquakes and typhoons, and artificial disasters like terrorist events and wars. To prevent disasters, many developed countries have prepared corresponding rules, regulations, and laws, identified relevant agencies and services, and incorporated the above content into the contingency plan, thus setting up a state-level disaster-relieved psychological assistance system [3].

2.1 Legislation for emergency management services

Developed countries not only specify psychological assistance in their emergency management legislation, but also take into full account psychological impact and services in various psychologically related measures of emergency management. In 1961, Japan, a country prone to natural disasters, promulgated Disaster Countermeasures Basic Law and built a sound legal system for disaster prevention and mitigation. It highlighted the important position and outlined implementation strategies of psychological assistance in post-disaster emergency management. After the outbreak of the 2011 earthquake off the Pacific coast of Tōhoku, the US government restructured its emergency management system. It launched President Policy Decree (PPD) (No. 8), established the emergency management system centered on emergency management capacity and the emergency management concept of “public participation,” and promulgated a series of standard, normative, and operational management documents aimed at providing guarantee for the emergency management system. In the system of core capacity indicator, many indicators are directly linked with psychological construction at individual and social levels, such as communication, collaboration, community restoration, health, social services, and accident relief [4].

2.2 Psychological service agencies for emergency management

Psychological services for emergency management are closely related to psychological demands for emergency management and comprise not only psychological crisis intervention in emergency for disaster-stricken people but also targeted services for different groups of people with different appeals for psychological services. In addition to legislation, it also needs to identify agencies delivering emergency psychological assistance to ensure the effective implementation of the assistance. In the US, those administration departments relevant to emergency psychological assistance mainly include Federal Emergency Administration of the United States (FEMA), United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Among them, FEMA is in charge of psychological assistance and reports directly to the US president. Official disaster-relieved psychological assistance is listed into Federal Response Plan (FRP), which contains 12 response functions. The post-disaster psychological service under Item 8 (Public Health and Medical Service) is presided over by the Public Health Service System of HHS.

2.3 Building of emergency psychological service teams

The international practice is that the government acting as the main player of emergency management endeavors to build psychological service teams in response to emergency. Some international organizations such as WHO and United Nations Children’s Fund, provide assistance and supervision for professional teams and specialized services by releasing working guides, conducting international cooperation, and collaboration between governments and non-governmental organizations (NGO).

The building of Germany’s specialized emergency rescue volunteer team is so unique that it deserves our learning. Germany’s emergency relief force consists of three parts: German Fire Department, the Technical Rescue Association under German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW), and five volunteer organizations. In other words, governments, professional associations, and social forces work together. The job responsibilities of the three relief forces are well defined. Volunteers involve in all professional fields of emergency management, including psychological services. This large-scale team is professional and distributed across Germany’s states, counties, cities, and towns like a grid, offering prompt relief response. Germany’s Act on Federal Voluntary Service (BFD) and other laws have clearly defined the rights and obligations of volunteers in emergency relief.

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Germany’s Civil Protection and Disaster Relief Act (ZSKG) and other laws have made it clear that governments at all levels are the leading force in the construction of emergency relief volunteer teams, and defined the funding models for volunteer team building by the federal government, state governments, and non-governmental donating bodies. During emergency relief, they coordinate and dispatch professional relief forces at all levels through a unified emergency command platform in line with scale, scope, and damage of disaster. Even in a normal state, Germany values the specialized training for volunteer teams and the building of reserve teams [5].

However, China has had no state-level professional psychological relief team so far. It is stipulated in the 13th Five-Year Plan for Medical Relief for Emergencies (2016–2020) issued by the National Health and Family Planning Commission of the People’s Republic of China (now the National Health Commission of the People’s Republic of China) that efforts should be made to strengthen the team building for psychological relief of various levels. But no definite detail has been made about how to realize team building. After the Wenchuan Earthquake, Institute of Psychology of CAS took the lead in setting up a national psychological relief alliance. The institute set an example on how to develop a pattern for the building of emergency psychological relief team. So far it has accumulated invaluable experience in team building and conducting specialized and standardized personnel training. It has played an important role in response to multiple emergencies. In March 2019, Institute of Psychology of CAS, coupled with National Earthquake Response Support Service under Ministry of Emergency Management of the People’s Republic of China, launched the first national psychological relief training for relief contingents aimed at making China’s disaster response and humanistic assistance international, specialized, and normalized. In terms of team building for emergency psychological relief, China is lacking in legal guarantee, defining of governmental competent departments, and governmental specific fund support, as compared with Germany showing sound practice. Besides, the team building for emergency psychological relief is divorced from the team building of regular public psychological services.

### 2.4 Construction of information system and the network platform for emergency management psychological services

Effective information communication and sharing plays an important role in cross-department emergency synergy. It constitutes an important premise on which emergency management services can be operated smoothly. In response to this pandemic, a number of agencies and organizations home and abroad employ big data to study the dynamics of the pandemic and offer suggestions to emergency response. It is stipulated in Emergency Response Law of the People’s Republic of China that a unified contingency information system should be established. One integral part of the information system should be a psychological service-specific system capable of providing emergency management decision-making with precise information concerning psychological service demands and resources. In addition, a psychological service network platform is a must. It is conducive to macro decision-making, guiding public opinion and communication, and satisfying people’s need.

Given the rapid spread of COVID-19, the psychological services in response to COVID-19 are conducted mainly through psychological relief hotlines and network. In this way, psychological service network platforms play a positive role. We take Mental Health Service System of Chinese Academy of Sciences ⑤ as an example. It delivers psychological self-test, popular psychological knowledge, psychological self-service, and psychological counseling. Through the platform, public psychological demands can be informed of and collected, and people in need can gain direct access to psychological services. At present, the platform is accessible to the faculty, faculty families, and students of CAS. On its first service day, it registered more than 10,000 clicks.

### 3 Policy suggestions

The public psychological service system is a system which well targets public psychological demands and is led by Party committees and governments of various levels, and a system in which various departments and organizations effectively collaborate with each other. It fully mobilizes social forces to provide individuals and organizations with targeted psychological services through public policies and services ⑥. The construction of the public psychological service system entails both regular construction and that of emergency management. For the emergency management like pandemic prevention and control, we provide five suggestions on strengthening the promotion of the public psychological service system.

#### 3.1 Giving full play to the existing public psychological service resources in the fight against pandemic

The health departments, political and legal affairs commissions of various local governments should take the lead in formulating the public psychological service scheme against pandemic and incorporate it into the overall deployment of pandemic prevention and control so that it can be planned as a

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① [https://zkyxjfkf.w.psych.ac.cn/](https://zkyxjfkf.w.psych.ac.cn/).
whole and proceed in a coordinated manner. Included in the scheme should be the objectives of the classified intervention, precise policy execution, pressure release, and maintaining stability. Detailed tasks should be dispatched in accordance with concrete local conditions. The priority is to provide psychological services for front-line medical personnel against the pandemic and provide long-term psychological relief lasting for at least one year for those people plagued by the pandemic. Various local mental health expert contingents and public psychological service agencies should be fully mobilized to properly guide public opinions for the recovery of economic and social order by conveying psychological health information, developing scientific and rational perception, and cultivating psychological health accomplishment.

3.2 Incorporating public psychological services into the emergency management system

Legislative institutions and emergency management departments should expedite the amendment of emergency response laws, enhance the monitoring and early warning of public perception of risks, intensify psychological crisis intervention for the public directly affected, and incorporate long-term individual psychological assistance and public psychological services into the program of recovery and reconstruction. Governments of various levels should add an independent program guaranteeing public psychological services to the contingency plan and specify relevant competent and coordinating departments, funding guarantee, and regular drills. The guarantee program should deliver psychological services integrating short term and long term in a tiered and classified manner.

3.3 Establishing a professional emergency service team consisting of psychological service professionals

Local human resources, civil affairs, industry and commerce, and health departments should strengthen their collaboration, make sure that public psychological service practitioners and agencies operate by law, and exercise qualification-based tiered and classified management. Learning from Germany’s team building of professional emergency relief volunteers, we should build our own volunteer teams in this regard at national, provincial (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government) and prefectural administrative region levels, including resources of public psychological service teams, technological resources, and regional distribution of resources; besides, in cooperation with other material guarantee information, the information system should be updated on a regular basis so that it can be directly put into use for emergency response to support overall research and judgment. Network platforms should be utilized to realize the precise docking and good management of public psychological service demands and resources in emergency management. Good use should be made of technology and platforms such as psychological hotlines and network psychological services.

3.4 Enhancing the construction of information system to guarantee the efficient emergency management

Local governments should add information collection, regulation, and control of psychological service demands and resources to the emergency management information system, including resources of public psychological service teams, technological resources, and regional distribution of resources; besides, in cooperation with other material guarantee information, the information system should be updated on a regular basis so that it can be directly put into use for emergency response to support overall research and judgment. Network platforms should be utilized to realize the precise docking and good management of public psychological service demands and resources in emergency management. Good use should be made of technology and platforms such as psychological hotlines and network psychological services.

3.5 Strengthening psychological research on emergency management

The construction of social governance system, national emergency management system, and public psychological service system is boiled down to human behavior. The construction of system is a kind of human behavior. The implementation of system is to exert influence upon human behavior. Consolidating and improving national governance should be people-oriented; that is, full respect should be given to people’s mental traits and psychological demands. Resulting from the development over the past 100 years, the science of psychology has played a constructive role in improving people’s psychological health and promoting social harmony and stability. It has yielded fruitful results in the field of emergency management, embodied in its psychological intervention research, research on the regulators’ risk decision-making, research on the public perception of risks, security psychology, disaster psychology, etc. While formulating the 14th Five-Year Plan and the mid-to-long term planning, relevant authorities shall value scientific research and talent training regarding emergency management and public psychological services so as to provide scientific support and talent reserve for improving the governance system and governance efficiency and capability.

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