

The Prevalence and Attitudinal Profiles of “Lying Flat” Behavior among Chinese College Students

Wei Lu¹, Yanan Wang², Liping Zheng², Zhimian Sun³, Jiaojiao Wang², Dong Liu^{4*}

¹ Department of Medical Information, Wannan Medical College, Wuhu, Anhui, China

² School of Nursing, Suzhou Medical College of Soochow University, Suzhou, Jiangsu, China

³ Department of Clinical Medicine, Wannan Medical College, Wuhu, Anhui, China

⁴ The First Affiliated Hospital of Wannan Medical College (Yijishan Hospital), Wuhu, Anhui, China

Abstract: Objective: To investigate the prevalence of “lying flat” behavior among Chinese college students and their attitudinal profiles. Methods: In June 2024, 5,683 students completed a self-designed questionnaire. Latent Profile Analysis and logistic regression were applied to identify groups and key predictors. Results: 69.21% reported “lying flat” behavior. Two attitudinal groups were identified, with 12 significant predictors, notably academic year, future planning, competitive awareness, self-perception, and social expectations. Conclusion: “Lying flat” is widespread and shaped by academic, social, and psychological factors. Academic support, career planning, and value guidance may mitigate its occurrence.

Keywords: college students; lying flat; attitudinal profiles; latent profile analysis; logistic regression

1. Introduction

The concept of “lying flat” emerged in China in 2021, originally referring to a reclining posture but now denoting a state of physical and mental exhaustion, with reduced pursuit of progress and productivity[1]. Similar trends, termed “NEET” (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), are observed globally[2]. Economic slowdown, social pressures, ambiguous career prospects, and diversified values contribute to this behavior[3]. Scholars hold divergent views: some consider it a coping mechanism for stress, while others argue it undermines social development and mental health[4]. Despite research on NEET behavior internationally, quantitative studies on “lying flat” among Chinese college students remain limited. This study aims to examine the prevalence, attitudes, and influencing factors of this behavior to inform educational and psychological interventions.

2. Methods

2.1 Subject Investigated

In March 2023, a subset of university students from Anhui Province was selected to participate in this survey. Prior to completing the questionnaire, participants received an electronic informed consent form and could proceed to fill out the questionnaire upon clicking “Agree”. This study has been approved by the Wannan Medical College Ethics Committee under approval number (102) in 2022.

2.2 General information collection

In this study, researchers designed their own questionnaires and distributed them through the online platform “Questionnaire Star”. Each participant could only answer once. The questionnaire content covered basic information such as gender, educational level and academic performance.

2.3 “Lying Flat” Questionnaire

Engagement in “lying flat,” perceptions, impact, and related factors. Items included attitudes toward life, responsibility, and societal expectations. LPA classified students into groups based on response patterns.

2.4 Statistical Method

Statistical analysis was performed using RStudio 4.4.0 software. Categorical data were summarized with frequencies and percentages; chi-square tests compared groups. Stepwise multivariate logistic regression identified factors influencing “lying flat” (AIC criterion). Potential profile analysis was conducted using Mplus 8.3 software. $P < 0.05$ was significant.

3. Result

3.1 General Information

Of 5,683 participants, 1,571 were male (27.6%) and 4,112 female (72.4%). A total of 3,933 (69.21%) reported “lying flat.” Gender and academic grade differed significantly between those exhibiting this behavior and those who did not ($p < 0.001$; Table 1).

Table 1: Comparison of General Characteristics Between “lying flat” and “non-lying-flat” College Students.

	lying flat	Non-lying flat	χ^2	P value
Gender			26.24	<0.001
Male	1007 (25.6)	564 (32.2)		
Female	2926 (74.4)	1186 (67.8)		
Academic grade			120.30	<0.001
Freshman	1180 (30.0)	768 (43.9)		
Sophomore	1818 (46.2)	663 (37.9)		
Junior	566 (14.4)	187 (10.7)		
Senior	179 (4.5)	76 (4.3)		
Fifth-year Student	144 (3.7)	27 (1.5)		
Graduate Student	46 (1.2)	29 (1.7)		

Note: Among 5,683 participants, gender and academic year differed significantly between those exhibiting ‘lying flat’ behavior and those who did not ($p < 0.001$).

3.2 Logistic Regression Analysis of Factors Influencing the “Lying Flat” Behavior

Stepwise logistic regression identified 12 significant factors, including academic grade, future planning, gender, education, competitive awareness, self-confidence, life pressure, belief, social expectations, and attitudes toward “lying flat” (Table 2).

Table 2. Results of Stepwise Logistic Regression Analysis of Factors Influencing “lying flat” among College Students.

Variables	β	SE	P value	OR	95% CI
Gender (ref. Male)					
Female	0.168	0.086	.050	1.18	[1.00-1.40]
Education background (ref. Associate Degree)					
Bachelor's Degree and Above	0.207	0.089	.019	1.23	[1.03-1.46]
Academic Grade (ref. Freshman)					
Sophomore	0.460	0.089	<0.001	1.58	[1.33-1.88]
Junior	0.360	0.121	.003	1.43	[1.13-1.82]
Fifth-year Student	0.940	0.252	<0.001	2.56	[1.56-4.19]
Graduate Student	-0.588	0.301	.050	0.56	[0.31-1.00]
Future planning (ref. No planning)					
Having Clear Plans	-0.908	0.145	<0.001	0.40	[0.30-0.54]
Sense of competition	-1.045	0.094	<0.001	0.35	[0.29-0.42]
Strong self-confidence	-0.734	0.100	<0.001	0.48	[0.39-0.58]
High social requirements	0.345	0.091	<0.001	1.41	[1.18-1.69]
Views of the evaluation of lying flat (ref. Positive evaluators)	0.328	0.091	<0.001	1.39	[1.16-1.66]
Views of the characteristic of lying flat (ref. Passive critics)	-0.375	0.088	<0.001	0.69	[0.58-0.82]

Note: Stepwise regression using AIC identified 12 significant factors influencing college students’ ‘lying flat’ behavior.

3.3 Latent Profile Analysis of the understanding and attitude towards the phenomenon of “lying flat” among college students

Through LPA analysis, we identified two distinct groups among college students. Participants in one group tended to offer neutral evaluations of the “lying flat” phenomenon. Members of the other group perceived the characteristics of “lying

flat” behavior as predominantly negative, viewing this trend as prevalent among college students and representing a long-term pattern. (Figure 1)

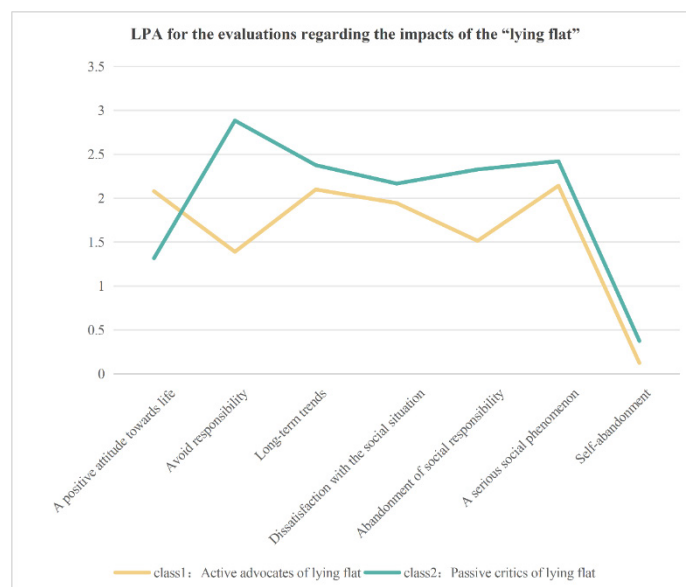


Figure 1. Latent Profile Analysis of the evaluations regarding the impacts of the “Lying Flat” behavior.

4. Discussion

This study found that 69.21% of Chinese college students engaged in “lying flat” behavior. Latent Profile Analysis identified two main attitudes: neutral and negative/self-denying. Logistic regression analyses showed that academic performance, future planning, competitive awareness, and attitudes toward “lying flat” were key predictors, with demographic and psychosocial factors also significant. Gender differences may reflect social expectations, while educational background and grade influence perceptions of pressure. Future planning was a crucial protective factor, as clear goals reduce the likelihood of “lying flat”. Strong self-confidence and beliefs further guard against disengagement, whereas social expectations and pressures increase susceptibility[5]. These results align with social identity theory, which posits that individuals seek belonging and self-worth through group membership[6].

Significant differences were observed across academic levels. Consistent with prior research, sophomores may show decreased positive affect and increased negative affect[7]. Students with clear plans are less likely to “lie flat.” Effective career planning—including goal setting, strategy development, and early exploration—can reduce stress and indecision. Experiential career activities help students acquire skills and professional values, fostering proactive planning[8]. Competitive awareness is also key: students who cope effectively with peer comparisons are less likely to disengage.

Perceptions of “lying flat” diverged. Some viewed it as dissatisfaction with society, linked to alienation, while others framed it as an adaptive coping strategy preserving psychological balance. Positive interpretations associated it with enthusiasm, well-being, and self-development[9]. In contrast, negative views linked it to lost motivation and diminished engagement[10].

Recommendations include strengthening freshmen’s values and competencies through education and practice, and providing targeted counseling to adjust perceptions of “lying flat.” At the societal level, equitable environments and enhanced career adaptability are essential. Limitations include potential response bias from online surveys, limited generalizability due to convenience sampling from a single university, and the cross-sectional design preventing causal inference. Future studies should expand sample size, include multiple regions, and adopt longitudinal designs.

5. Conclusion

“Lying flat” is prevalent among Chinese college students. Academic performance, future plans, competitive awareness, and attitudes toward “lying flat” significantly influence the adoption of this behavior. Educational interventions and career planning may mitigate its prevalence.

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