

# Graduate psychological safety study

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**Abstract:** With an increasing national focus on mental health, there is a pressing need to address the well-being of graduate students. Societal instability and violent events have amplified psychological insecurity among them. This paper reviews existing literature on factors influencing the psychological security of graduate students. It categorizes these factors into individual, family, school, and societal dimensions. It identifies research gaps, proposes future study directions, and suggests strategies to enhance psychological security. The objective is to support personal growth, improve mental health, and empower effective navigation of academic and societal challenges.

**Key words:** psychological security; graduate students; influence; overview

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## 1 Introduction

In recent years, China has witnessed a growing emphasis on mental health, as exemplified by the introduction of the "Exploration of Specialized Services for the Prevention of Depression" in August 2020. The initiative advocates for a dedicated psychological intervention team to enhance mental health services. At the same time, incidents of violence, such as demolitions, labor disputes, vandalism, arson, and fraud, are raising concerns about social stability and citizen insecurity.

Amidst these challenges, graduate students are facing various pressures such as academic, mentorship, adaptation, interpersonal, romantic, and employment factors, impacting their mental well-being. Addressing their psychological safety is crucial to prevent extreme behaviors.

Understanding influencing factors is essential. This paper categorizes factors into family, society, school, and individual dimensions. It addresses research gaps and proposes future directions. The paper provides strategic recommendations to enhance the psychological security of graduate students based on family, society, school, and individual factors. The exploration enriches the theoretical framework, deepens understanding, and promotes mental health in graduate students, ultimately benefiting society. The systematic integration of factors and recommendations offers an operational information framework for enhancing psychological security.

## 2 The concept of psychological safety

### 2.1 Basic definition of psychological safety

When exploring graduate students' psychological security, a key task is to precisely define the concept. According to Luo and Wang, it involves inherent psychological activities rooted in emotions of safety, confidence, and freedom in human interactions [1]. Cong and An suggest that it encompasses anticipating potential dangers and an individual's

perception of their ability to handle these dangers, expressed through certainty and controllability [2]. In summary, scholars may interpret security feelings differently. These feelings signify subjective experiences that evolve with changing environments. They involve judgments and predictions of external risks, primarily comprising psychological elements such as certainty, interpersonal security, self-confidence, and control.

## 2.2 Factors influencing psychological safety

Scholars extensively study psychological safety as a mental health indicator. However, limited literature exists on graduate students' psychological safety, especially in comparison to university students. Chen (2009) identified stressors such as academic pressure, social dynamics, and job-seeking stress for graduate students. Family, educational methods, and individual states further influence their psychological safety mechanisms [3]. This paper comprehensively reviews the psychological safety of graduate students, taking into account individual, family, school, and social factors.

### 2.2.1 Individual factors

Scholarly research has found a positive correlation between college students' levels of security and their levels of self-confidence [4]. On the other hand, Meng put forward an important point that stress and psychological resilience can impact psychological security [5]. Sun et al. emphasize the tight link between a sense of security and interpersonal trust [6]. This implies that establishing good interpersonal relationships may enhance college students' sense of security. Lastly, Li found that graduate students exhibit the most severe symptoms of obsessive anxiety by analyzing the differences in the manifestation of psychological insecurity across grades [7].

### 2.2.2 School factors

Jiao emphasizes the impact of factors on students' psychological sense of security. These factors include geographical location, infrastructure, public safety, and cultural environment of schools [8]. In addition, Qian highlights the influence of the free learning environment on students' psychological sense of security [9]. Cheng and Yan believe that campus safety can affect the psychological sense of security among graduate students. They draw this conclusion through an analysis of a survey on the stability of campus safety in higher education institutions [10]. Zhang points out that several factors are crucial. These include confusion in mentor selection during self-development, poor mentor-student relationships, difficulties in communication between mentors and students, and mentor stress [11]. Stress from academic papers and exams significantly impacts the psychological sense of security among graduate students.

### 2.2.3 Family factors

Li emphasizes external factors, such as family economic conditions, which have a significant impact on college students' psychological sense of security [12]. In addition, some scholars have conducted related research on parenting styles and the sense of security. Research results indicate that "authoritarian, rejecting, and neglectful parenting styles may increase insecurity" [13]. Zhang highlights that family economic pressures impact the psychological sense of security. These pressures include economic difficulties, delayed economic independence, and imbalances in financial support for graduate studies.

### 2.2.4 Social factors

Li et al. surveyed 238 randomly selected graduate students. The results indicate that these students possess a strong sense of psychological security and receive considerable social support [14]. The psychological sense of security among graduate students is significantly positively correlated with social support and its various dimensions. Social support plays a significant predictive role in the psychological sense of security among graduate students. Zhang highlighted that unexpected life events, such as unfavorable social trends and social disharmony, influence the psychological security level of graduate students.

### **3 Research gaps and improvements**

#### **3.1 Cross-cultural research**

The sense of security is a subjective experience influenced by diverse cultural backgrounds. While some research has been conducted, additional cross-cultural studies are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the concept and its influencing factors. This involves comparing individuals' definitions and evaluations of security in various cultural contexts, as well as exploring the significance and manifestations of security across different cultures.

#### **3.2 Focus on graduate student research**

Currently, most research focuses on the sense of security in undergraduate students. There are relatively fewer studies on graduate students, including both master's and doctoral students. Future research should delve into the sense of security among students at different academic levels. This will help to better understand their experiences with academic and life pressures and identify potential intervention measures.

#### **3.3 Comprehensive studies**

The sense of security is influenced by various factors, including individual, school, and family factors. Future research can comprehensively explore the interrelationships among these factors to deepen the understanding of the formation and impact of security. This will help identify which factors have the most significant impact on security and how to better support individuals' sense of security.

### **4 Strategies to improve psychological sense of security**

#### **4.1 Individual factors**

Schools can enhance graduate students' confidence by offering psychological counseling and self-development courses. Initiatives such as art therapy workshops provide a creative outlet for expressing emotions, reducing stress, and enhancing emotional security. Strengthening academic support and guidance, along with promoting social interaction and teamwork, helps students build social connections and alleviate loneliness.

#### **4.2 School factors**

Ensuring essential infrastructure, implementing high-tech security measures, and fostering a positive humanistic environment are crucial. Adequate facilities, smart surveillance, and emergency systems enhance safety. Promoting cultural activities encourages participation, while establishing a campus innovation center offers economic opportunities. These initiatives bolster students' confidence, thus improving their psychological sense of security.

#### **4.3 Family factors**

Expanding economic support channels through scholarships and job opportunities alleviates financial pressure. Creating family support groups and introducing positive parenting styles through education and support networks contribute to a sense of security. Initiatives such as a family cooperation reward program strengthen family connections. The program involves families participating in voluntary services, enhancing students' overall sense of security.

### **5 Conclusion**

This paper extensively explored influencing factors on the psychological sense of security in graduate students. It encompassed family, school, and individual aspects, highlighting the complexity and diversity of this sense. Identified research gaps include insufficient cross-cultural studies, limited focus on graduate students, lack of comprehensive research, and insufficient exploration of intervention measures. To bolster graduate students' psychological security, the paper suggests strategies addressing family, school, and individual factors. Proposed measures encompass education, support, and resource provision, aiming to cater to diverse student needs and foster a more robust sense of security.

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## Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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