Sexual orientation and depressive symptom in China: The role of social support

Jingchu Hu, Pinchao Luo, Zhiming Liu, Xuelan Liu, Xishan Huang, Hongman Wang, Yanlei Jia and Xifu Zheng
South China Normal University, China

Sexual minority individuals are reporting more psychological problems (e.g. more depressive symptoms, less social support) than their heterosexual peers, and the link between depressive symptoms and social support is well established. But this disparity and association has never been explored directly in Chinese sexual minorities. Using data from an internet survey, we compared 317 Chinese sexual minority individuals with 267 demographic-matched Chinese heterosexual controls on social support and depressive symptoms. We investigated whether sexual orientation was related to depressive symptoms, and whether this association was mediated by social support in Chinese sexual minority individuals as well as in heterosexual individuals. Results showed that, sexual minority individuals reported lower levels of social support, and more depressive symptoms than heterosexuals. Overall, sexual orientation and social support both predicted depressive symptoms, while social support fully mediated (but did not moderate) the relationship between sex orientation and depressive symptoms. The study highlights the role of social support in sexual orientation and depressive symptoms among Chinese individuals, indicating possible cultural influences. Targeting the Chinese individuals’ distress that can be associated with sexual orientation may enhance the prevention efforts, particularly in Chinese sexual minority individuals with reduced social support.

Biography
Xifu Zheng has expertise in “Understanding and improving the psychological well-being in different kinds of population in China”. He and his lab members are currently working in two ways. First, they are investigating the mental health (e.g., life satisfaction, self-esteem, depressive symptoms) in Chinese people by large-scale survey. Second, they are exploring the underlying mechanism of the formation of mental health problem by combined behavior and EEG/MRI experiment in human beings. These approaches allow them to understand and improve the mental health of Chinese people.

zhengxifu@m.scnu.edu.cn