

ARTICLE

What Can We Do? An Action Research of Precise Psychological Support for Parents of School-Refusing Adolescents

Linyan Ruan^{1,2}, Yanming Ren³, Haibo Zeng⁴, Chune Zhang^{1,2}, Li He^{1,2*} 

¹Teachers' College, Beijing Union University, Beijing 100011, China

²Learning and Psychological Development Institution for Children and Adolescents, Beijing Union University, Beijing 100011, China

³Faculty of Health and Wellness, City University of Macau, Macau 999078, China

⁴School of Economics and Management, Communication University of China, Beijing 100024, China

ABSTRACT

Nevertheless parents often fall into depression, anxiety, and stress because of their children's school refusal which hinders their children's school reentry on the contrary, they still play primary and critical roles in the school reentry process of school-refusing adolescents. This study aimed to provide targeted psychological support to 274 parents of school-refusing adolescents through an action research through four action cycles. Based on parental needs and cutting-edge research, we underwent four cycles from top-down expert support to peer support for parents of school-refusing adolescents, from intervening in the families of school-refusing adolescents to intervening in the social-ecological system in which these families live, from a single discipline to interdisciplinary exploration, and emphasizing the postmodern psychological philosophy that emphasizes local knowledge. The results are: (1) a warm and peer-support internet we-chat group was established, (2) multi-disciplinary and multi-perspective psychological support and systems with different programs for these parents are figuring out, (3) a more comprehensive social atmosphere without stigmatization are for the phenomenon of school attendance problem are come into being, step by step.

Keywords: Action research; School refusal; Psychological support; Peer support; Social-ecological system; Interdisciplinary; Local knowledge

*CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Li He, Teachers' College, Beijing Union University, Beijing 100011, China; Email: heli@buu.edu.cn

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 30 June 2024 | Revised: 8 July 2024 | Accepted: 20 July 2024 | Published Online: 25 July 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/jpr.v6i3.6982>

CITATION

Ruan, L., Ren, Y., Zeng, H., et al., 2024. What Can We Do? An Action Research of Precise Psychological Support for Parents of School-Refusing Adolescents. *Journal of Psychological Research*. 6(3): 12–32. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30564/jpr.v6i3.6982>

COPYRIGHT

Copyright © 2024 by the author(s). Published by Bilingual Publishing Co. This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

In most countries and regions, schools are the central environment for the healthy growth and development of adolescents. Once a young person refuses to attend school, he or she might face a series of serious consequences in the short or long term. In the short term, adolescents who refuse to attend school or show persistent difficulties in remaining class may face academic difficulties, increased family conflict, peer problems, depression or anxiety; long-term constraints include school dropouts, poor occupational and employment outcomes, significant psychopathology, and risk behaviors, such as problem alcohol and drugs abuse^[1, 2].

School refusal, a worldwide public health challenge, affects approximately 1%–7% of school-age adolescents^[3, 4]. The first prerequisite for addressing school refusal is a clear and unambiguous definition, however, refusal and truancy, two common types of school attendance problems, are often easily confused^[5]. The term school refusal refers to adolescents who often have anxiety or other signs of emotional distress (e.g., somatic problems), whereas the term truancy is often used to refer to adolescents who intentionally do not attend school and hide their nonattendance problems from their parents. This behavior is often but not necessarily associated with oppositional defiance disorder and conduct disorders^[6].

Although there is a degree of disagreement among researchers on the definition of school refusal, researchers generally agree that school-refusing young people have one or more following characteristics: (1) seek the comfort and security of home, preferring to remain close to parental figures, especially during school hours; (2) display evidence of emotional upset when faced with the prospect of having to attend school, though this may only take the form of unexplained physical symptoms; (3) manifest no severe anti-social tendencies, apart from possible aggressiveness when attempts are made to force school attendance and (4) does not attempt to conceal the problem from parents^[7].

1.1 Need for school refusal interventions

Once adolescents refuse to attend school, it is difficult for them to resolve the problem on their own, and their school refusal behaviors and associated symptoms tend to worsen over time^[8]. Interventions for adolescent school

refusal have long spanned a range of disciplines and have been approached from many different perspectives. These interventions have played different roles in addressing young people's refusal school, and have also been refined and developed over a range of practices, culminating in a form of mutual integration of multiple interventions.

In the early days, the focus of addressing these problems was on school-refusing adolescents based on anxiety. Clinical approaches to the problem of school refusal have focused on the symptoms of anxiety and depression in adolescents who refused to attend school^[9]. Common types of medical intervention include tricyclic antidepressants, selective serotonin reuptake, Inhibitors, etc^[10, 11]. But medical intervention has not been accepted by school-refusing adolescents and their parents because of its side effects^[9]. Meanwhile, some school-refusing adolescents because of their fluid and amorphous nature of anxiety and depressive symptoms as well as the overall ambiguity and uncertainty of the effectiveness of pharmacological interventions considering that some school-refusing adolescents who do not have any form of anxiety and depressive symptoms^[12, 13].

Many empirical studies have shown psychological approaches to be effective in school refusing adolescents' anxiety/depression symptom relief and facilitating return to school (King et al., 2000; Maynard et al., 2015)^[14, 15]. Cognitive behavioral therapy has been considered the most common, cost-effective, and effective in addressing anxiety-based school-refusing adolescents^[16]. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can help school-refusing adolescents to improve somatic symptoms and change irrational beliefs related to school attendance, and specific techniques commonly used include relaxation training, exposure therapy, somatic management skills, and cognitive restructuring (Heyne et al., 2022; King et al., 2000)^[3, 14]. King et al. followed up on 15 children who successfully resumed school through CBT therapy for 3–5 years. Thirteen children were able to adjust well to school 3–5 years after returning to school without exhibiting any of the more severe school refusal symptoms and receiving additional treatment^[17]. Some researchers have also explored the efficacy of combining CBT and pharmacological interventions for school-refusing adolescents, and a study of interventions for 47 school-refusing adolescents with severe anxiety and depression, found that improvements in student attendance

were better in the 8-week combined imipramine (a drug that targets symptoms of anxiety and depression) and CBT intervention group than in the combined placebo (to match the imipramine drug intervention group, but there was no drug effect) and CBT intervention group^[18].

However, the psychological approaches have also suffered some questioning and criticism. Firstly, psychological approaches, like clinical approaches, are aimed at alleviating some of the psychological/psychiatric symptoms of adolescents. But these approaches are less applicable to school-refusing adolescents with externalizing problems such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), conduct disorder, etc^[12]. Secondly, psychological approaches ignore the broader contextual factors that influence adolescents' school refusal problems, such as less consideration of factors from the school level (bullying in schools, social exclusion, teachers' classroom management)^[19], from the societal dimension (high demands for academic achievement)^[20], as well as from the family perspective. On this basis, more and more researchers have called for the key to solving the problem of school refusal should lie in emphasizing the functions and roles among the various systems of the social-ecological system in which adolescents live, and promoting the organic linkage and cooperation among the various systems^[21, 22].

1.2 Parents' involvement in school refusal

Parents and/or other caregivers (abbreviated as "parents") played a key role in the emergence, development, maintenance, and prognosis of school refusal in adolescents^[23, 24]. A research study by Egger showed that in a group of school-refusing adolescents with both internalizing and externalizing symptoms, 75% of the biological fathers or mothers had received psychiatric treatment^[6]. Recently a research review employing the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) method to review the eight existing studies and found that parental psychological/psychiatric problems, family function, maternal overprotection, and parental self-efficacy were all significant predictors of adolescents developing school refusal^[25].

Parents However, in the beginning, parents usually attribute this phenomenon to academic problems and ignore the children's physical/psychological problems, when youths do not attend school or show any visible signs of school refusal problems until the youth refuse to go to school completely,

and then parents may be aware of the seriousness of the problem and feel very frustrated and helpless as a result^[26-28]. Furthermore, if the problem of school refusal persists, parents may become reactive or anxious, and eventually become "paralyzed"^[28].

The problem may worsen over time if the youths do not attend school soon^[29], while most young people are not capable of returning to school on their own^[30], hence the need for timely and effective intervention in the youths' own and surrounding systems is of supreme importance. To date, evidence suggests that parental involvement in the intervention process can greatly increase the rate of youth return to school^[15, 31]. At the same time, Sandler et al. (2011) found that parents actively use parenting skills and build parental self-efficacy to address problems in parenting^[24], as well as to have long-term positive effects on adolescents. In addition, Heyne et al. (2001) indicated that parents may be more effective and accessible targets in interventions to support their children who refuse to attend school^[32]. Overall, factors from parents may contribute to or accelerate the emergence and development of school refusal. when it comes to the problem has been created, parents can play their function and role in helping to solve the problem.

While once young people appear to refuse to attend school, parents might feel depressed, anxious, and stressed, which may reduce their ability to support their children^[33], thus preventing the teenager from returning to school. Therefore, these parents are likely to need some level of outside support to stabilize themselves and learn how to help their school-refusing children.

Family intervention is a common intervention to address adolescent school refusal. School refusal problems are often compounded by parental anxiety, complacency^[28], and family interventions can be very helpful and supportive to the parents to ensure that they are sympathetic and firm^[34]. Family interventions are more flexible compared to other psychological approaches. Kearney and Silverman (1995) summarized five types of unhealthy family functioning, which are entangled family, detached family, segregated family, conflicted family, and blended family^[35]. Depending on the type of family functioning, the direction of interventions varies greatly in terms of the specific measures to be taken, and the counselor/therapist needs to conduct a proper overall family functioning. The counselor/therapist

also needs to properly assess the entire family functioning and be flexible in selecting and implementing techniques such as contingency contracting, role-playing, social skills training, etc. Richardson (2016) points out that if the parents are willing to establish a trusting alliance with the therapist and assume a firm, authoritative role, school-refusing adolescents' attendance will readily increase and their mental status will improve^[28].

However, as a psychological approach, as mentioned earlier, family interventions in the traditional sense weaken/ignore the role of factors such as peer interaction, school climate, and community of school-refusing youth. In a 6-month Intensive In-home Child and Adolescents Psychiatric Services demonstrated no improvement in attendance for school-refusing adolescents with social issues in school and suggested that these school-refusing adolescents may benefit from school perspective perspectives^[36].

1.3 School involvement in school refusal

In the school context, the causes of and interventions for school refusal relate to three main dimensions: peer interactions, curriculum, and teacher behavior^[21].

In terms of peer interactions, some school-refusing adolescents may be more likely to experience difficulties in social situations or even social isolation and bullying^[37]. And a good partnership, as a protective factor for school refusal problems, can be very supportive for adolescents and prevent them from refusing school^[38]. Behavioral therapies such as systematic desensitization, relaxation training, social skills training, and situational imagery are used to improve the social problems of school-refusing adolescents^[37]. Meanwhile, schools should also provide appropriate support for adolescents who have difficulties with peer interactions, such as establishing effective anti-bullying mechanisms^[39, 40].

Factors such as curriculum that do not meet the needs of the individual adolescent and student disinterest in the curriculum itself may contribute in some way to the problem of adolescent school refusal^[41]. Alternative educational, after-school programs, individualized and flexible instruction may be able to address the problem of school-refusing youth caused by the poor curriculum^[16].

In terms of teacher behavior, inappropriate teaching methods, over-emphasis on consistency, and frequent criticism and blaming of students are all factors that contribute to

adolescents' school refusal^[42]. The focus of the intervention is on appropriate training for teachers to help them understand and master how to help school-refusing adolescents academically, socially, and emotionally^[43]. In addition, several school-wide, broad-based measures (e.g., rewarding or penalizing students for attendance) are effective in increasing student attendance^[44, 45]. Finally, communication and cooperation between home and school have also been recognized as an important part of helping school-refusing youth return to school. Communication between teachers and parents can lead to mutual understanding and support, and common ways to do this include home visits, parent involvement in classroom activities, and workshops^[46].

Although some of the interventions mentioned above provide a suitable school climate for school-refusing youth, some of them seem to have difficulty taking the step from home to school and benefiting from these interventions^[47].

1.4 Community involvement in school refusal

The influence of community factors on youth school refusal to attend school is often presented as a contextual factor, with modes of transportation, unorganized/unsafe neighborhoods, poor sub-cultural values, and lacking of appropriate educational supportive services all contributing to some degree to the emergence of school refusal^[12, 48].

Community-based approaches to addressing school refusal among adolescents are often based on systemic interventions in partnership with schools and families^[16]. Such systemic intervention models and approaches are fluid and multifaceted, and the specific means of intervention depend largely on the characteristics and needs of the target population, as well as the availability of local resources and policies^[49]. Out-of-school time programs, vocational training, parent education, and counseling are all interventions that can support the educational, social, physical, and mental health of students and increase the likelihood that they will return to school^[50-53].

1.5 Family-based multidisciplinary interventions in school refusal

Currently, interventions centered on the families of school-refusing adolescents make up for the past neglect of the positive/negative role of schools and communities

on the issue of school refusal. Many research teams are increasingly focusing on the organic interactions between the ecosystems in which adolescents are embedded, and have developed a range of practical, interdisciplinary, family-based interventions for adolescents who are excluded from school that involve all aspects of the home, school, and community. For example, the integrated team (also known as family coach) for families can provide targeted support to families of young people with attendance difficulties by connecting home, school, and community, which can empower parents and increase young people's sense of safety and visibility^[54]. Reissner et al. (2019) developed and tested a program that incorporates cognitive-behavioral therapy, family counseling, school counseling, and psychoeducational physical exercise program, and a multidisciplinary team (including psychotherapists, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, social workers, teachers, and a sports scientist) developed specific interventions under each module^[55]. This approach allows flexibility in choosing different interventions under the four modules according to the needs of different adolescents and their parents. In addition, interdisciplinary teams are working in alternative and transitional education that has been shown to improve attendance, mental health, quality of life, and positive experiences in school for young people who refuse to attend school^[56].

Overall, to better support parents of school-refusing youth, alleviate their anxiety, improve their family functioning and parent-child relationships, and help their children address barriers on the road back to school, we provide diversified and precise psychological support for school-refusing youth by using parents as the entry point and referring to the idea of single counseling to interdisciplinary team interventions in the development of family interventions.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Methodology

Since Kurt Lewin introduced the concept of action research in 1946, action research has been applied to solve social problems and has evolved to encompass almost all fields of research and work^[57]. Action research, as a methodology, is commonly used by practitioners from different disciplines (such as psychology, sociology, education, etc.) to promote the economic, political, psychological, and spiritual improvement and people's development in the communi-

ties^[58]. Heron and Reason (2008) stated that action research can develop knowledge and contribute to educational development and active mobilization by engaging participants in an "extended epistemology" of empirical, representational, propositional, and practical ways of knowing^[59]. In other words, effective action research can generate solutions to problems and practical knowledge that can be applied to life, avoiding the traditional disparity between mainstream scholarship and practice^[59, 60].

It is generally accepted that Lewin was the first person who coined a complete framework for action research and emphasized that action research should proceed in a spiral cycle of steps that include identifying the problem, planning, implementing the action, reflecting on the process and results, replanning, implementing the action, reflecting again, and so on^[61, 62]. This study will be based on the action research framework proposed by Lewin.

2.2 Project background

School refusal studies in China started later than it in the West, and the serious consequences of school refusal for adolescents have not yet received sufficient attention from the community, but there is growing evidence that school refusal among Chinese adolescents has become a problem that needs urgent attention and resolution. Many Chinese psychological and psychiatric clinics claimed that school refusal among adolescents has become the most important problem to address^[63]. A study of 6369 Chinese adolescents suggested that about 22.5% of students exhibited different degree of school refusal behaviors and the severity of school refusal tended to increase with age^[64].

In addition to this, we must also consider the impact of Covid-19 on the school refusal of Chinese youth. The consequences of Covid-19 have infiltrated every aspect of the daily lives of Chinese adolescents^[65]. The Ministry of Education estimates that approximately 1.8 billion students have used the Internet and electronic media to access classes at home^[66]. However, long-term social isolation and health concerns are expected to have significant impacts on the adolescents' academic achievements, physical and psychological health^[67, 68]. For example, a survey of 668 parents from different regions of China suggested that some adolescents have some degree of posttraumatic stress disorder (20.7%) and depressive symptoms (7.2%)^[69]. Given the high co-

linearity between school refusal and psychological/mental health problems^[25], the situation of adolescent school refusal in China is likely to worsen. Finally, based on the results of research on hikikomori (a Japanese term to refer to the phenomenon of reclusive adolescents or adults who withdraw from social life, often seeking extreme degrees of isolation and confinement), we should be wary of further deterioration of school refusal into hikikomori^[70].

2.3 Participants

Our research team “S” was created in early 2020 and was led by a faculty member “A*” with a Ph.D. in psychology and a faculty member B with a Ph.D. in education and was consisted of 14 members (including 7 current graduate students with a background in mental health education and 7 undergraduate students). The two leaders of the research team have extensive field research experiences and are primarily responsible for the design of the research protocol and the process of adapting the research direction and process to the specific situation promptly. The undergraduate and graduate students in the research team are responsible for observing research dynamics, collecting and organizing research data, and providing feedback on various problems encountered during the research process with the supervision from A & B. Team members meet online every month to share information they have observed, collected, and compiled over the recent period, to reflect on the current research process, and to discuss specific courses of action for the future.

Participants were recruited by using the electronic poster and snowball sampling, and all participants signed an electronic informed consent form and confidentiality agreement, with 274 parents in the group as of June 6, 2023.

3. Project stages: Spiral action in the field of school refusal

The study followed the basic framework of action research, with a cycle of identifying the problem, planning, taking action, reflecting on the research process and findings, and developing the next plan. There are four stages (Figure 1).

Stage 1: Focusing on the phenomenon of adolescent school refusal and understanding the current situation of families with school-refusing adolescents and their needs;

Stage 2: Creating a community for families with school-refusing adolescents; providing psychological support to parents within the community; exploring further ways to address the problem of school refusal through lectures by experts and interviews with these parents;

Stage 3: Promoting supportive behavior and provide psychological support for parents in the community; understanding the problem of school refusal from the school’s perspective and inviting more experts in the field to discuss the issue of school refusal without stigmatization; providing support for young people who refuse to attend school.

Stage 4: Consolidating and improving community-parents support groups; exploring and disturbing the social-ecological system in which school-refusing adolescents live; exploring interdisciplinary intervention and prevention of school refusal, drawing on the experiences shared by hikikomori intervention experts; exploring multiple educational pathways from the perspective of comprehensive and systematic interventions.

3.1 Stage1: Preparation phases

Part 1-Plan: Initial understanding and collecting the needs of families with school-refusing adolescents through interviews

Before the study started, the two leaders of the research team found in their counseling sessions that the majority of visitors (parents) reported that their children refused to go to school and that visitors were very anxious, but could not do anything about it. Based on these situations, the two leaders decided to explore how to help these parents address their children’s school refusal from a research perspective and formed the research team “S”.

At the beginning of the study, we recruited families with school-refusing adolescents using electronic posters. Drawing on Kearney’s criteria for identifying school refusal, we defined the recruitment criterion as “complete non-attendance” at school for at least one semester^[12]. Additionally, we excluded families whose adolescents refused to attend school due to severe mental illness or for other valid reasons (e.g., physical illness)^[71].

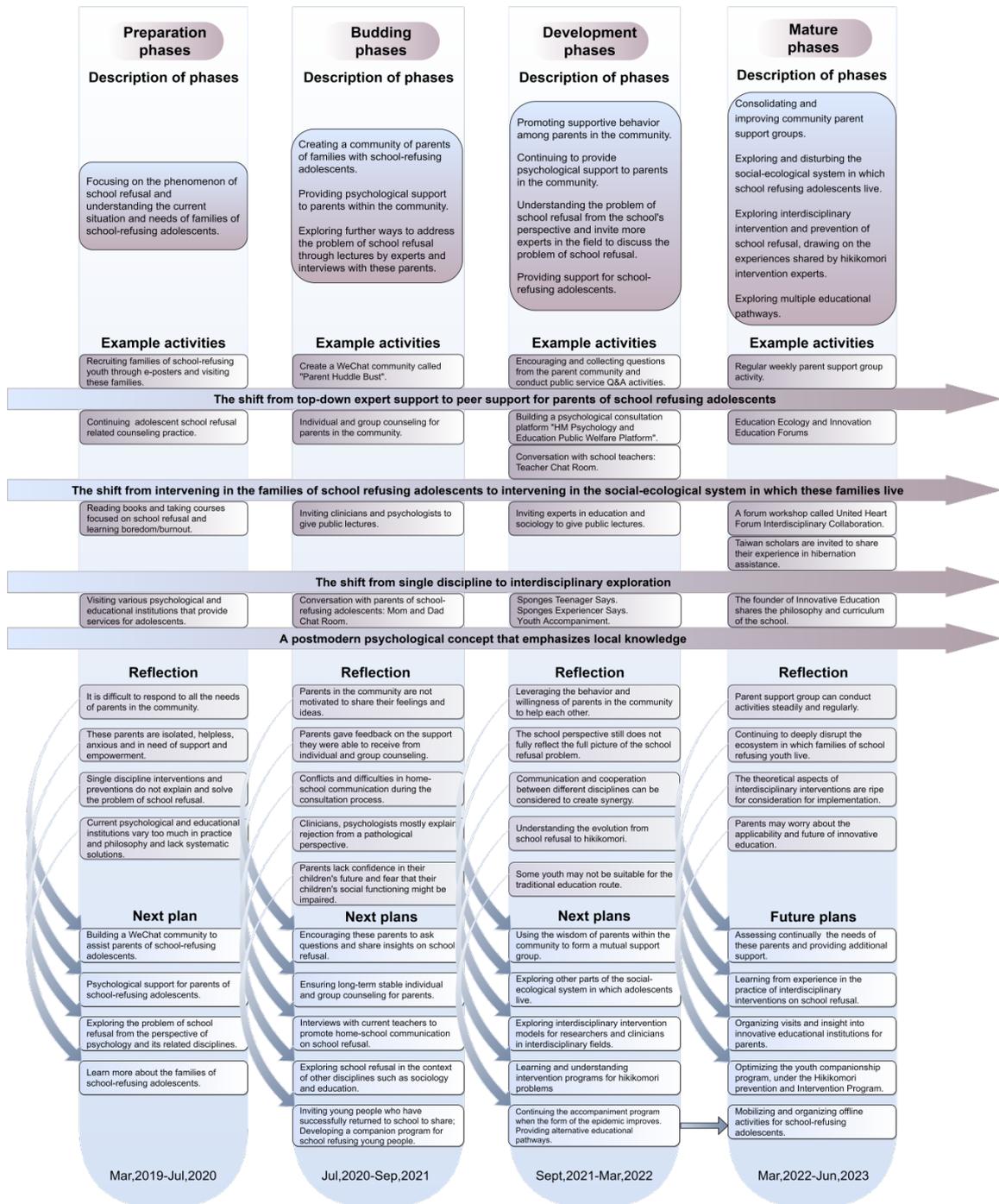


Figure 1. Action research and the process of action based on time and situation.

In the end, we recruited and conducted in-depth interviews with a total of seven families with school-refusing adolescents (Table 1). The results revealed that the reasons behind the youth who refused to attend school are highly variable and complex. While the parents of these youths showed some degree of anxiety and powerlessness, and we recognized that these parents needed support and empower-

ment.

We made a preliminary plan, on the one hand, we plan to learn more about the precise situation and needs of families who refuse to go to school through interviews and psychological counseling; on the other hand, we expect to find some sets of solutions to the problem of adolescent school refusal from the existing literature, books, and social institutions.

Table 1. Basic information of the seven youths who refused to go to school in the initial interview (All adolescents' names were replaced with pseudonyms).

Family number	Profile of school refusing young people
1	After Adam succeeded in getting into a major high school, he suddenly told his parents that he didn't want to go to school and wanted to play E-Sports.
2	Bob stopped attending school one week after the start of his junior year because of excessive language and behavior by his homeroom teacher.
3	Carol stopped attending school a week after the start of the school year because she participated in the idol practice auditions in her junior year and was criticized by her class teacher in front of the class and her classmates evaluated her. Carol has made several attempts to return to school, but she failed.
4	Daisy did not take the Senior High School Entrance Examination as she suffered from depression in her junior year due to the heavy academic pressure and homework load.
5	Emma didn't like go to school since kindergarten. After entering junior high school, she stopped going to school before the final exams of her first year because she felt physically and mentally uncomfortable due to the increased academic pressure and social fear.
6	Fannie was diagnosed with depression a year after her little sister was born and began experiencing non-attendance in fifth grade and indirect non-attendance in her junior year due to the effects of her illness.
7	George was bullied by his classmates shortly at his first year of school, and thereafter became fearful. He did not go to school a month later, and was diagnosed with depression.

Part 2-Action: Continuing to collect information from practical activities and trying to find solutions from literature and social organizations

To better understand and address the problem of adolescent school refusal, we continued to recruit families with school-refusing adolescents through e-posters. As the number of families recruited grew, the diverse and numerous needs of parents of school-refusing adolescents made it difficult for us to respond to all of them. Hence, we decided to invite all the parents recruited to a larger community focusing on the common problems of school refusal where we give them a degree of psychological and educational support.

To help these parents scientifically and effectively, we began to read psychological books and take courses focused on school refusal and boredom/burnout (in Chinese scholars' perspective, the problem of school non-attendance is more related to academic burnout), hoping to find solutions to the problem of school refusal.

Subsequently, we visited various psychological and educational institutions that provide services for adolescents. We chose these institutions from recommendations from parents, and advertisements.

Part 3-Reflection: The effectiveness and limitations of support based on psychological perspectives remain unclear

As we continued our school refusal-related counseling practice, we compiled interview data from the parents we

recruited and concluded that these parents experienced the following psychological journey in addition to negative experiences such as anxiety and depression when addressing their teen's school refusal: (1) isolated and unsupported. They were not only isolated by their relatives, friends, and colleagues, but also considered as "deviants" and felt ashamed that their children do not go to school, and/or (2) seeking help without proper resources. These parents did not know how to find an organization to solve the problem of school refusal, and/or (3) worrying about their children's future, especially the career plan and the children's mental/health issues. However, as more and more parents were recruited and our research team grew tired of providing granular support to these parents, we considered bringing together parents with a certain homogeneous problem to address it.

We have not found ready-made solutions to the problem of adolescent school refusal in psychological literature, books, and curricula. It turned out that the causes, interventions, and prevention of school refusal are very complex and may not be addressed by a single discipline of psychology alone.

As for the various psychological and educational institutions visited and researched. We found that there are indeed some organizations in China that are trying to address the problem of school refusal, but the practice of these organizations varied greatly and lacked the basis of corresponding

empirical research to integrate into a systematic solution.

Part 4-Improvement: Building communities that can provide broad-based and precise support to parents and expanding the disciplinary perspectives of support programs

We need to gather for these parents and, depending on their problems, provide targeted and extensive support to parents struggling with common problems, and at the same time open up a counseling platform of a pro-bono nature to provide psychological counselling to a small number of parents.

Meanwhile, our next step is to further confirm the effectiveness of the psychology disciplinary perspective in supporting parents of school-refusing teenagers and in solving the problem of teenager school refusal, and to explore the expansion of support programs under different disciplinary perspectives based on the psychology disciplinary perspective.

Finally, because we did not find any existing theoretical and practical results on supporting parents of school-refusing adolescents, after a detailed discussion among the research members, and taking into account the research directions of the two principals, we decided to follow the concept of postmodernism and start from the needs of the parents in the community, to further understand the current situation and predicament of these families, and to determine the details of the support program accordingly.

3.2 Stage2: Budding phases

Part 1-Plan: Provide extensive and individualized support to parents in the community

We intend to co-create a normative community for the recruited parents, within which all parents can express their dilemmas and needs, and we will communicate with these parents and invite them to participate in the matched support we offer. We also hope that parents with the same issues can communicate with each other and help each other with the program.

Part 2-Action: Support and postmodern dialogue groups not limited to psychological approaches

At this stage, given the impact of the epidemic, we created an online group for parents of adolescents who refused to go to school, called "Parent Huddle".

Since some parents in the community were still in a state of intense anxiety due to their children's long-term school refusal, we offered individual counseling and group counseling channels for parents who needed to participate

through online registration. The counselings were conducted online or offline as appropriate. The research team eventually provided individual counseling for 125 parents in the community and group counseling for a total of 13 sessions, for a total of 142 person-time.

We initially focused on adolescent school refusal from a counseling perspective, and at this stage, we intended to continue in this direction by inviting clinicians and counselors to hold public lectures to discuss the causes, interventions, and prevention of adolescent school refusal. From a psychological/spiritual perspective, the key to solving the problem of adolescent school refusal is to pay more attention on improving parent-child relationships in the family and alleviating adolescents' internalization problems (e.g. anxiety, depression, etc.).

We also held several events called "Dad Chat Room" and "Mom Chat Room". We invited some experts to have collaborative conversations on topics of current interest to parents within the community, and conducted a total of seven "Dad Chat Room" and five "Mom Chat Room" events (**Table 2**).

We designed the Mom and Dad Chat Room to show how two different identities, fathers and mothers, recognize and intervene in teenage school refusal problems, thereby promoting understanding between the couple and forming a consistent alliance to face and solve the problem.

Part 3-Reflection: Multiple supports begin to show results but reveal more problems

In the initial period of community building, the parents in the group did not appear willing and motivated to share their thoughts and feelings. We need to give these parents some incentive to interact in the future.

In the area of individual/group counseling, the parents said that they were able to receive enough support and empowerment. A mother who attended group counseling shared her feelings and gains*:

'I was so happy to meet Dr. A and the group today. I didn't expect the psychodrama format (a kind of drama that allows patients to vent their emotions and achieve therapeutic effects) to be so touching. I saw that I was once confused and helpless, and I also saw the light of hope shining in the future. I am grateful for your organization, it's great to have you'.

Table 2. Detailed information about Dad Chat Room and Mom Chat Room.

Session	Date	Core guests	Topics
Consultant: <i>Dr. C*</i>			
Host: <i>Dr. A</i>			
Reflective team: Parents in the community			
Dad Chat Room			
1	11/12/2020	Topic holder: Q (father)	What can I do to help our children
2	11/02/2021	Topic holder: W (father)	How to get our children back to school by improving the parent-child relationship
3	11/10/2021	Topic holder: E (father)	How to change children's perception of value
4	11/16/2021	Topic holder: R (father)	What changes can help get children on the right track
5	11/23/2021	Topic holder: T (father)	How to help school-refusing young people find a consistent direction to work towards
6	11/30/2021	Topic holder: Y (father)	Change in parental perception is the cornerstone of children's growth
7	12/07/2021	Topic holders: U and I (father)	A spiritual journey by conversation
Mom Chat Room			
1	11/24/2020	Topic holder: A (mother)	How can anxious parents and depressed children walk together
2	11/12/2021	Topic holder: S (mother)	How do support school-refusing adolescents as parents to better adapt to school
3	11/26/2021	Topic holder: D (mother)	Finding reasons why children refuse to go to school and ways to help them return to school
4	12/15/2021	Topic holders: F and G (mother)	Freedom to grow is a gift to our children! How to help them start a new journey
5	12/21/2021	Topic holder: H (mother)	Change the paradigm and find happiness

* Consultants serving the Y Psychology and Education Public Interest Platform.

Again, counseling can help these parents take a better look at their past selves and discover their inner resources, as another mother shared.

‘Thanks to the teachers of the research team! Thanks to the partners who participated in the event, thanks to the partners who shared their hearts openly and sincerely, thanks to the partners who allowed us to look at ourselves again in the mirror, and thanks to the research team and the partners who supported and encouraged us. We are grateful for the support and encouragement of our research team and partners’.

In addition, we found that during the group/individual counseling process, parents repeatedly reported problems in the home-school communication process. For example, some schools lacked awareness and response options to the problem of adolescent school refusal, believing that refusal to attend school was the problem of the adolescents themselves and their parents and that the school should not be

responsible for it. Furthermore, some parents reported that teachers were risk factors in the development of youth refusal to attend school (such as teacher bullying).

However, we encountered three difficulties in the practice process. First, even though some parents within the community have improved the parent-child relationship in the family through individual /group counseling, their children have not resumed school. Second, most of these adolescents have stigmatizing attitudes toward counseling and taking psychotropic drugs, so they refused any form of psychological/psychiatric treatment. Third, some of the school-refusing adolescents did not have internalizing problems and did not appear to have significant problems with parent-child relationships with their parents. They just did not want to stay at school without any obvious reasons. Therefore, we considered expanding the disciplinary perspective further by inviting researchers and practitioners from more fields, such as sociology and education, to discuss solutions to the problem of school refusal together.

Parents who participated in the postmodern conversations group also gained a great deal. The mother of a 16-

year-old boy who refused to attend school shared her feelings after listening to one of the Dad Chat Room:

'Today I listened very carefully to your conversation with Dr. C. It was also a sharing of your experiences over the past two years, and I really benefited from it. In your account of your daughter's upbringing, I knew that you attach great importance to choose a school in the provincial capital in the hope that she would get a good education. In addition to school education, you also enrolled her in summer camps and winter camps during the holidays, hoping for her better development...At the end of your sharing, you have your reflections, including society, school, family, and children at all levels. You have mentioned Schopenhauer (I think it said "pain and pleasure are always intertwined" but I don't remember too clearly), which let me see your good learning, wisdom, and unconditional acceptance of children. This is what I want to learn from you. You have also talked many times about how your loved one is also an active learning parent and how you encourage and help each other, which is much better than my family's situation'.

A father with the screen name Diligent left a message in the WeChat group after listening to one of the Mom Chat Room:

'Today, after listening to your sharing, I feel that it is not easy for mothers, and I also have tears in my eyes. The process is similar, just the difference in length. The children need our support, and we also need our children to inspire us. One light for the corner, ten thousand lights for the country. I think the attention, care, and love of Dr. A and Dr. C can light up our group. I also believe that we can hold each other close and keep each other warm. I suggest that Dr. A shine a little brighter and warmer and stick to the conversation'.

We noticed that in almost every Mom and Dad Chat

Room, parents in the community expressed their confusion about whether their children would be able to return to school and their concern about their children's impaired social functioning due to their long-term refusal to engage with their peers.

Part 4-Improvement: Encourage parental interaction and confidence for parents, as well as an exploration of other parts of the social-ecological system in which school-refusing adolescents live.

Our individual/group counseling and postmodern conversations have had good results, so we intend to continue them. But we should also energize parents to interact with each other themselves, so that they can offer understanding and support to each other, rather than just having parents passively receiving support from us or some of them being active in small groups.

We must also pay attention to the problems reflected by parents in their consultations, in the ecosystem in which the school-rejecting adolescents live, where the school and society seem to contribute in some way to the emergence and worsening of the problem of school refusal.

To increase the confidence of parents in the community, we focused on seeking out teenagers who have successfully returned to school in the community to share their own experiences with these parents and, at the same time, we figured out a plan to have graduate/undergraduate students go to accompany the school refusing teenagers as elder brothers/sisters to keep their social functioning.

3.3 Stage3: Development phases

Part 1-Plan: Linking Practice and Academic Research Together

In this stage, we plan to go further in both practice and theory. On the practical side, in addition to providing parents with more assistance from a disciplinary perspective, we continue to standardize and proceduralize the support we already provide, which facilitates the stability and continuity of the support provided to parents. In addition, we will provide specialized support to address parents' concerns about the likelihood of their teenager returning to school and socialization issues. On the theoretical side, we will publish the results of our stage-by-stage research in the form of a paper, aiming to have a greater impact on the social level.

Part 2-Action: Multidimensional support at the practi-

cal level and rallying and de-stigmatization at the theoretical level

To motivate parents in the community to communicate and share, we conducted several public welfare Q&A sessions. Before each activity, parents will solicit questions in the WeChat group about their most current concerns/confusions, and graduate students will be responsible for collecting and organizing the questions, which will then be answered uniformly by the Q&A experts based on their professional knowledge and practical experience. Finally, we held a total of four public Q&A sessions, and the Q&A experts answered a total of 69 topical questions from parents in the group around 5 topics (**Table 3**).

Given that most parents benefit from the individual and group counseling provided by the research team, we determined to establish the “Y Psychology and Education Public Interest Platform” to ensure a stable and long-term counseling resource for the parents in the community. In the meantime, in response to parents’ feedback on home-school communication, the research team invited teachers to conduct a “teacher chat room” to learn how to ensure a dynamic balance between home and school from the teachers’ perspective and work together to address the problem of adolescent school refusal.

In addition, we have come to appreciate the importance of cooperation between experts from different disciplinary backgrounds. We invited experts, scholars, and clinical practitioners from a wider range of disciplinary backgrounds to examine the issue of school refusal. Experts in different fields have different focuses on addressing different types of problems in families with school-refusing adolescents.

To increase a sense of hope for parents in the community, we conducted the “Sponges Teenager Says” and “Sponges Experiencer Says” activities, and eventually invited three teenagers with a history of school refusal to share their own experiences.

For solving the socialization problems of school-rejecting adolescents, we also reported on the “youth accompaniment” activities, in which the graduate students of the research team accompanied the young people who refused to go to school, as “bosom brothers” and “bosom sisters”, to observe the living conditions of these young people and understand their inner world. The family members in the community were very welcoming and supportive of the youth

accompaniment activities, and the research team eventually accompanied 4 teenagers 13 times. However, this activity was not continued due to the epidemic, and the parents in the community hope that the research team can continue this activity.

Finally, as a milestone of our action research, we also published an article titled “The Concept of Refusal to Learn” in the Perspective of Collaborative Parenting between Home, School, and Society. The paper analyzes the difference between the concept of “school refusal” and other concepts such as boredom, explains the influence of the individual, family, school and society on the problem of school refusal, and finally proposes the possibilities of integrated intervention, long-term accompaniment and collaborative intervention to solve the problem of school refusal.

Part 3-Reflection: Perspectives and measures to provide support to parents in the community are expanding, and academic paper has attracted extensive media attention

We noticed a marked increase in the tendency and willingness of the parents in the group to interact since the end of the first Q&A session, with parents sharing everything from how they felt during the Q&A, how they have changed, to how their children have been doing over time, and what their current confusions and perplexities are. Parents in the group seem to be starting to take on the role of helpers, giving each other advice on pressing issues. We considered using this group dynamic to move families within the community from top-down expert support to peer support groups.

Through feedback from parents and teachers, the group realized that schools also have their limitations and that many of the problems with home-school communication come more from the constraints of other parts of the social-ecological system centered on adolescents’ families. Therefore, in the next phase, we continued to explore other subsystems of the social-ecological system that affect adolescents’ school refusal.

In terms of further interdisciplinary cooperation, the research team hypothesized that it might be more effective if researchers, experts, and clinicians from different disciplinary backgrounds could collaborate in an interdisciplinary format on how to address school refusal issue. Besides, a researcher in a sociological context described one of the potentially serious consequences of school refusing youth - hikikomori. The issue of hibernation resonated with some

Table 3. Detailed information about public welfare Q&A sessions.

Session	Date	Q&A experts	Topics
1	09/26/2021	Dr. A and Dr. B	Questions and Answers about each presentation of the United Heart Forum
2	10/12/2021	Dr. A and Dr. B	Family Series Hot Issues—Confusion in Parent-Child Communication and Interaction (1)
3	10/19/2021	Dr. A and Dr. B	Family Series Hot Issues—Confusion in Parent-Child Communication and Interaction (2)
4	04/06/2021	Dr. A and MZ*	School Attendance Difficulties for Youth and Families Breakthroughs (1)
5	04/12/2021	Dr. A and XZ*	School Attendance Difficulties for Youth and Families Breakthroughs (2)

* Consultants serving the Y Psychology and Education Public Interest Platform.

of the parents in the group because their children are currently refusing school and staying with their parents for long periods, with a tendency to become hibernators soon.

Our academic papers have attracted widespread public and media attention, with many research teams, primary and secondary schools, and psychological and educational institutions inviting team leaders to give talks on school refusal, and many mainstream media outlets beginning to use the term “school refusal” in place of the term “boredom” and to speak out on behalf of the families of young people who refuse to go to school.

While, we have also encountered two obstacles. Our “Sponges Teenager Says” and “Sponges Experiencer Says” activities have not attracted a lot of attention from parents within the community, we speculated that these youths’ experiences of school refusal were too different from their own children, so other parents could not able to gain effective insights from the experience. As for another difficulty, During the accompanying process, feedback from a graduate student caught the attention of the research team:

‘Two of the youth who refused to attend school did not show significant emotional distress at home. They had a very regular lifestyle pattern and spent time learning knowledge and skills each day, and they did not appear to have the desire to return to school or the academic life within the school was not necessarily suitable for them.’

Through our further observations, we eventually came to a tentative conclusion after discussion that it may be difficult for such school-refusing youth to eventually return to school.

Part 4-Improvement: Motivating parents in the community to help each other and continuing to explore possible solutions to the problem of adolescent school refusal in a multidisciplinary context

We realize that parents within the community already have a certain propensity and motivation to help each other, and we intend to stimulate that part. In addition, we intend

to set up an interdisciplinary intervention team to explore the possibilities of interdisciplinary intervention with families of teenagers who refuse to go to school.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, we have learned that hibernation, which has been studied in the field of sociology, is often one of the most serious consequences of the school refusal problem, and that methods of intervening in hibernation may also be useful to us and the parents in the community.

As for school-refusing adolescents who may not eventually return to school, we would like to provide these youth with resources for alternative educational pathways based on the reality of their situation.

3.4 Stage 4: Mature phases

Part 1-Plan: Formation of well-established parent support groups and other possibilities for providing support

Firstly, we plan to promote and support the formation of parent support groups so that parents can develop long-term and stable forms of mutual support among themselves. Secondly, we intend to invite experts from various fields in the form of a forum to discuss the issue of adolescents refusing to go to school and to reach a theoretical level of agreement for the establishment of an interdisciplinary team. Thirdly, we intend to draw on the theories and interventions of hikikomori interventions, and to consider the possibility of transferring these theories and interventions to school-refusing adolescents. Finally, we need to provide some additional educational pathways for families of school-refusing adolescents who cannot return to school anyway.

Part 2-Action: Mutual support within the community and multidimensional support outside the community

At this stage, one of the parents in the group suggested that she would like to invite the parents in the group to share their emotions and confusion by expressing their thoughts about some issues at a regular time every week. We quickly

approved the plan and provided some technical support for the smooth running of the event. Since then, parent support meetings have been held almost every Friday at 7:00 p.m. By the end of June 2023, the group had held 74 parent support meetings.

We also conducted a total of five educational ecology and innovation education forums from the youth education ecosystem. In addition to this, we have published an academic paper entitled “A Multi-case Study of the Potential Relationship between School Bullying and School Refusal”. Both these empirical and theoretical results shed some light on the potential mechanisms of production and deterioration of school refusal in the educational ecosystem.

Following the interdisciplinary intervention and prevention idea, we finally invited experts, researchers, and clinicians from various fields such as education, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and clinical medicine to conduct a forum sharing session on interdisciplinary collaboration to solve the problem of adolescent school refusal. Experts, researchers, and clinical workers from various fields have now agreed on the theoretical level and will try to explore the practice of interdisciplinary interventions in the future.

In addition to the interdisciplinary forum, we also invited experts, researchers, and clinical workers in the field of hikikomori to conduct a discussion.

Finally, to explore the diversified educational pathways for school-refusing adolescents, we invited the founder of Innovative Education to share his philosophy and curriculum, which provided more resources on educational pathways for the families in the community.

Part 3-Reflection: Sustaining the dynamics of parent support groups in the long term, improvements in external support.

The parent support group activities have been well established and the parents in the group have transformed from passively receiving support from experts at the beginning of the group to actively forming a support group by themselves. In the future, we will continue to provide additional support to the parents in the group.

While good progress is being made with internal support, we also need to keep improving external support. Because our interdisciplinary team has reached an initial level of agreement at the theoretical level, we might consider selecting some families for a pilot intervention. And before the

intervention, we will assess the specifics of each family’s social-ecological system and design a feasible intervention program based on the specific problems.

In addition, since the localization of diversified educational paths in China is somewhat restricted, some parents expressed doubts and concerns about other educational paths.

At last, as the social impact of our academic papers continues to grow, our theoretical findings will continue to be enriched and we will continue to explore support and intervention pathways that are localized to China.

Part 4-Improvement: Possible future directions and measures of support

We propose some directions for future endeavors and possible interventions based on current action research progress. First, we consider that the problem of adolescents refusing to go to school may change in various forms and degrees over time, and the status and needs of parents within the community may change as well, so we need to keep adjusting the direction and measures of our support. Secondly, our interdisciplinary team also needs to start working on the practice and can learn from the experience and lessons from the existing interdisciplinary practices abroad. Thirdly, we will invite some representatives of young people in innovative educational institutions to share the educational concepts and models of their schools. Fourthly, we will consider re-launching the Accompaniment Program, as we have found that the Accompaniment Program is also effective in the area of hikikomori intervention. Lastly, we will consider organizing an offline group of young people who refuse to go to school and carry out a series of targeted activities.

4. Discussion

4.1 The shift from top-down expert support to peer support for parents of school-refusing adolescents

The parents in the study initially joined the WeChat community because of their children’s non-attendance, which would have been a challenge for these parents, for example, to take the risk that this choice would be effective for their children to return to school. While on the other hand, we believe that these parents had strong motivations to seek help, and perhaps these motivations could have helped them change their behavioral and cognitive patterns in a way that

would have had a positive effect on their children's school refusal.

Initially, almost all parents in the community had one goal in mind—to get their children back to school as soon as possible, not realizing that the school-refusing adolescents themselves had different perceptions and feelings about their refusal, for example, some school refusers did not go to school to adjust to their internal discomfort^[72]. Most of these parents' original thoughts were also to learn about psychology and education, especially expecting some concrete and actionable solutions to the school refusal problem to guide them on how to deal with various situations in their children's daily lives and how to motivate their children to return to school as soon as possible. One of the team's PhDs reminded parents that:

'Our school-refusing adolescents often seem to say and act out of character at home, and parents want specific solutions for each out-of-control behavior, but to put it another way, can we use these behaviors and words as a mirror of parents' insecurities and anxieties?'

As we provided them with various psychological support, their anxiety was alleviated and a new understanding of school refusal emerged step by step. They discovered their past inappropriate perceptions, thoughts, and behaviors, perceived the pain and suffering of their children during the school refusal process, and began to focus more of their time and energy on repairing their parent-child relationship. One of the parents shared in the We Chat group:

'My child has been out of school for a while and in the past I was always worried about him falling behind in his homework, so I paid for a tutor to guide him in his homework. I also gave my child a daily schedule of study and exercise at home, which resulted in my child remaining in a state of stress at home, my child showing very obvious resistance, and a very rigid parent-child relationship between me and my child. One day, I realized that all of this was essentially because I was particularly anxious about receiving negative comments from friends and family about my child's lack of schooling.'

2 months ago, I started to change my strategy and decided to do just one thing, and that was to let my child really relax and I wasn't interfering in most of his life. Now, I can clearly feel that the parent-child relationship has improved and the child has more smiles on his face than before, al-

though his schedule is still a bit black and white.'

Gradually, under the guidance and encouragement of the leaders, they went from not making any kind of comments to sharing their feelings after participating in various activities, and then gradually began to share their daily lives, including their understanding of the problem of school refusal and the changes in their own and their children's growth, and later these parents began to express and share their confusion and negative emotions. By this time, the parents' community had taken the shape of a support group. The parent support meetings, which have been held since the beginning and are still going on today, mark the formation of a standardized support group for parents within the group, who have been able to discuss and address important issues related to teenage school refusal on a long-term and stable basis. What our research team will be able to do in the future is to continue to provide additional and complementary support to the support groups based on their needs. One of the parents who attended the parent support meeting said:

'Because of the same expectations we can come together, the same experience makes us connect more and more tightly. I suggest we listen to more voices of those who have been there or experienced it if we have time! Thanks to M for spearheading the self-organized conversation! We can gain strength as long as our hearts are connected to each other. As long as we as parents can communicate more, we can more or less solve the problem.'

4.2 The shift from intervening in the families of school-refusing adolescents to intervening in the social-ecological system in which these families live

As mentioned earlier in our counseling with parents of school-refusing adolescents, these parents often experience frustration and powerlessness over their children's school refusal, suffer from strange looks from relatives and friends, but do not know where to turn for help and support, and are often in a state of extreme emotional distress. In addition to affecting their own physical and mental health, these distressing experiences may be passed on to their children, exacerbating the further development of school refusal behaviors^[33, 73]. It is timely and necessary for us to provide them with individual and group counseling to alleviate their emotional confusion and correct misperceptions in their par-

enting process.

In counseling, parents expressed a desire for more support from the school for their refusing youth. To this end, after providing long-term and stable counseling support for families who refuse to attend school, we began to explore the school subsystem of the social-ecological system in which families of school-refusing adolescents live^[21]. Myers and Pianta (2008) showed that good, positive teacher-student relationships play an important role in adolescents' development and sense of belonging in school^[74]. We invited school teachers to interact with parents in the community to share parents' and teachers' perspectives on school refusal, and to explore how the family and school systems of refusing adolescents deal with problems in the communication process and how they can work better together in the future. However, the emergence and development of school refusal behaviors are not determined solely by two factors: school and family. We extended our study beyond the family and school to the educational ecosystem in which adolescents live to find the most appropriate factors that influence the emergence and development of school refusal for different families. At the same time, parents are becoming aware of the multiplicity of reasons for the school refusal problem, and N shares from a fresh perspective that:

'In a sense, our children may have been sent from heaven to wake us up Our children are purer people who need to grow more freely in a wider space, and today's families, schools and society do not provide the space they need, so they are "sick" So they are "sick" and try to wake us and society up with their "sickness".'

Finally, the manifestation and severity of the hikikomori problem have drawn the attention of parents within the community who are concerned about their children developing into hikikomori youth, and therefore the future research team will also focus on the prevention of the hikikomori problem to minimize the risk of hikikomori among these school-refusing youth.

4.3 The shift from a single discipline to interdisciplinary exploration

Before the initiative, we learned that most of the other agencies that intervene in adolescent school refusal problems do so from their own clinical experience and lack empirical research as a theoretical basis. In contrast, our research team

has a rich disciplinary background, especially the two leaders of our research team have a rich theoretical knowledge base and clinical experience related to psychology and we believe that our professionalism is the key to gaining the trust of parents in our community.

We started from a psychological perspective and continued to combine empirical research findings with our practical experience, gradually extending to the perspective of clinical medicine, then to education and sociology, and finally to interdisciplinary intervention and prevention of adolescent school refusal. This reflects a shift in the path and direction of our research. First, the limitations of a single discipline have become increasingly evident. Take the psychology/clinical medicine perspective as an example, these two disciplines are mostly used to address adolescents' anxiety and depression symptoms and thus facilitate their return to school. However, some school-refusing adolescents within the community do not have these internalizing issues, and their ability and motivation to return to school are more constrained by other factors (e.g. school violence and teacher bullying within the school)^[75, 76]. In addition, there are students who simply do not like the curriculum in the modern education system. That is, from a broader disciplinary perspective, the problem of school refusal does not imply an individual problem in one family, but rather reflects a group issue that potentially occurs in society as a whole. Second, understanding and intervention options for school refusal issues may vary too much across disciplinary perspectives, potentially creating conflicts between them and a disconnect from the actual situation of adolescents^[54].

Nevertheless, in line with Reissner et al. (2019) multi-module (MT) intervention protocol^[55], the research team should also consider the physical health of adolescents and consider inviting physical education teachers/specialists to join the interdisciplinary team in the future. In conclusion, the interdisciplinary exploration of school refusal is both a gradual exploration by the research team and a simultaneous confirmation of the call for interdisciplinary understanding and interventions in research findings on school refusal.

4.4 A postmodern psychological philosophy that emphasizes local knowledge

Research on school refusal in China started late, and most youth psychological and educational institutions cur-

rently do not have systematic and structured programs to address school refusal. At the same time, although school refusal has been researched in Western countries for decades, the research and intervention programs in Western countries may not be suitable for Chinese adolescents due to social, economic, political, and cultural differences between countries/regions. Therefore, we adhered to postmodern psychological concepts (PMP), focusing on local knowledge and solutions. In this action research, this philosophy and behavior are reflected in two aspects.

First, we delve into the perspectives of the fathers and mothers of school-refusing youth, from both the paternal and maternal perspectives, to understand how the fathers and mothers respectively view the problem of school refusal, what they have done during the youth's refusal process, and what obstacles they have encountered in helping their children return to school.

Second, we provide support to the parents of school-refusing adolescents based on their needs. Each family's needs vary depending on their situation, and we use different forms of practice to support the needs of different parents in the community, including visits by research team members to accompany the youth and providing resources for diverse educational pathways for school-refusing youth.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This is an action on school refusal from the perspective of school-family-community-healthcare partnerships. What can we do?

Firstly, we appeal the phenomenon of school refusal is not only a psychological issue of student behavior, nor a pedagogical issue of family education and teacher instruction, but also a sociological topic that needs to be co-created by schools and educational organizations in terms of management/intervention systems and professional support from social third-party organizations.

Secondly, it should be noticed that school refusal should be regarded as an issue of school attendance problem in the whole society.

Last but not least, school refusal is a learning process for some students which can happen to every family. So it makes sense to understand and remove stigma for it. Everyone can do something!

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, He Li and Ruan Linyan; Methodology, Ruan Linyan and Zeng Haibo; Software, Ruan Linyan and Zhang Chune; Action investigation, He Li, Ruan Linyan, Zeng Haibo and Ren Yanming; Resources, He Li and Ruan Linyan; Writing—original draft preparation, Ren Yanming and Ruan Linyan; Writing—review and editing, Ren Yanming and Ruan Linyan; Visualization, Ren Yanming and Ruan Linyan; Funding acquisition, He Li and Ruan Linyan. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Due to the nature of this research, participants of this research did not agree for their data to be shared publicly, so supporting data is not available.

Funding

This research was funded by Outstanding Young Talents Project of the 2022 Beijing Municipal University Teacher Team Construction Support Plan "Interdisciplinary Ecological Intervention on School Attendance of young people", grant number BPHR202203224; Beijing Union University High Level Incubation Project "exploration on the path of 'accompanying intervention' for adolescents with school attendance difficulties", grant number SK20202303; Beijing Union University High-quality Development for the Capital Project "School-Family-Community Collaborative Education Mechanism Research in Beijing", grant number SK30202303; China Preschool Education Research Association Project "an Action Research of Children's Social Emotional Ability Curriculum Development and Implementation", grant number K20210195. This research was funded by them.

Acknowledgments

Support from numerous parents of school-refusing adolescents, friends and experts from Beijing Union Uni-

versity and Communication University of China is gratefully acknowledged. The authors also would like to thank anonymous reviewers who gave valuable suggestion that has helped to improve the quality of the manuscript.

Ethics Statement

All participants in the research have signed the informed consent form. At the same time, for the group of minors involved in the study, we have ensured that the minors and their parents have signed the informed consent form. Secondly, our research process is in line with the declaration of Helsinki. Finally, the research attaches great importance to and protects the privacy of each participant. We have ensured that there will be no information that can identify the participants in the paper.

References

- [1] Bernstein, G.A., Warren, S.L., Massie, E.D., et al., 1999. Family dimensions in anxious–depressed school refusers. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*. 13(5), 513–528. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0887-6185\(99\)00021-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0887-6185(99)00021-3)
- [2] Flakierska-Praquin, N., Lindström, M., Gillberg, C., 1997. School phobia with separation anxiety disorder: A comparative 20-to 29-year follow-up study of 35 school refusers. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*. 38(1), 17–22. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-440X\(97\)90048-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-440X(97)90048-1)
- [3] Heyne, D., 2022. Developmental Issues Associated with Adolescent School Refusal and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy Manuals. *Zeitschrift für Kinder-und Jugendpsychiatrie und Psychotherapie*. 50(6), 471–494. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1024/1422-4917/a000881>
- [4] Heyne, D.A., Brouwer-Borghuis, M., 2022. Signposts for school refusal interventions, based on the views of stakeholders. *Continuity in Education*. 3(1), 25–40. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/cie.42>
- [5] Heyne, D., Gren-Landell, M., Melvin, G., et al., 2019. Differentiation between school attendance problems: Why and how? *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*. 26(1), 8–34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2018.03.006>
- [6] Egger, H.L., Costello, J.E., Angold, A., 2003. School refusal and psychiatric disorders: A community study. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*. 42(7), 797–807. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1097/00004703-200310000-00028>
- [7] Berg, I., 1997. School refusal and truancy. *Archives of Disease in Childhood*. 76(2), 90–91. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1136/adc.76.2.90>
- [8] King, N.J., Tonge, B.J., Heyne, D., et al., 1998. Cognitive-behavioral treatment of school-refusing children: A controlled evaluation. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*. 37(4), 395–403. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-199804000-00017>
- [9] Gullone, E., King, N.J., 1991. Acceptability of alternative treatments for school refusal: Evaluations by students, caregivers, and professionals. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*. 61(3), 346–354. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.1991.tb00991.x>
- [10] Heyne, D., King, N.J., Tonge, B.J., et al., 2001. School refusal: Epidemiology and management. *Paediatric Drugs*. 3, 719–732. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2165/00128072-200103100-00002>
- [11] Labellarte, M.J., Ginsburg, G.S., Walkup, J.T., et al., 1999. The treatment of anxiety disorders in children and adolescents. *Biological Psychiatry*. 46(11), 1567–1578. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0006-3223\(99\)00248-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0006-3223(99)00248-6)
- [12] Kearney, C.A., 2008a. An Interdisciplinary Model of School Absenteeism in Youth to Inform Professional Practice and Public Policy. *Educational Psychology Review*. 20(3), 257–282. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-008-9078-3>
- [13] Tyrrell, M., 2005. School phobia. *The Journal of School Nursing*. 21(3), 147–151. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10598405050210030401>
- [14] King, N., Tonge, B.J., Heyne, D., et al., 2000. Research on the cognitive-behavioral treatment of school refusal: A review and recommendations. *Clinical Psychology Review*. 20(4), 495–507. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7358\(99\)00039-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7358(99)00039-2)
- [15] Maynard, B.R., Brendel, K.E., Bulanda, J.J., et al., 2015. Psychosocial interventions for school refusal with primary and secondary school students: A systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*. 11(1), 1–76. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2015.12>
- [16] Kearney, C.A., 2008b. School absenteeism and school refusal behavior in youth: A contemporary review. *Clinical Psychology Review*. 28(3), 451–471. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2007.07.012>
- [17] King, N., Tonge, B.J., Heyne, D., et al., 2001. Cognitive-behavioural treatment of school-refusing children: Maintenance of improvement at 3-to 5-year follow-up. *Scandinavian Journal of Behaviour Therapy*. 30(2), 85–89. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02845710117011>
- [18] Bernstein, G.A., Borchardt, C.M., Perwien, A.R., et al., 2000. Imipramine plus cognitive-behavioral therapy in the treatment of school refusal. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*. 39(3), 276–283. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-200003000-00008>
- [19] Havik, T., Bru, E., Ertesvåg, S.K., 2015. School

- factors associated with school refusal-and truancy-related reasons for school non-attendance. *Social Psychology of Education*. 18, 221–240. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-015-9293-y>
- [20] Liu, L., Gu, H., Zhao, X., et al., 2021. What Contributes to the Development and Maintenance of School Refusal in Chinese Adolescents: A Qualitative Study. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*. 12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.782605>
- [21] Lyon, A.R., Cotler, S., 2009. Multi-systemic intervention for school refusal behavior: Integrating approaches across disciplines. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*. 2(1), 20–34. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1754730X.2009.9715695>
- [22] Sugrue, E.P., Zuel, T., LaLiberte, T., 2016. The ecological context of chronic school absenteeism in the elementary grades. *Children & Schools*. 38(3), 137–145. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdw020>
- [23] McShane, G., Walter, G., Rey, J.M., 2001. Characteristics of adolescents with school refusal. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*. 35(6), 822–826. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1440-1614.2001.00955.x>
- [24] Sandler, I.N., Schoenfelder, E.N., Wolchik, S.A., et al., 2011. Long-term impact of prevention programs to promote effective parenting: Lasting effects but uncertain processes. *Annual Review of Psychology*. 62, 299–329. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.121208.131619>
- [25] Chockalingam, M., Skinner, K., Melvin, G., et al., 2022. Modifiable Parent Factors Associated with Child and Adolescent School Refusal: A Systematic Review. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*. 1–17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10578-022-01358-z>
- [26] Bryce, G., Baird, D., 1986. Precipitating a crisis: Family therapy and adolescent school refusers. *Journal of Adolescence*. 9(3), 199–213. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-1971\(86\)80003-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-1971(86)80003-3)
- [27] Danno, M.C., Esbjørn, B.H., Risom, S.W., 2020. The perceptions of anxiety-related school absenteeism in youth: A qualitative study involving youth, mother, and father. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*. 64(1), 22–36. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2018.1479302>
- [28] Richardson, K., 2016. Family therapy for child and adolescent school refusal. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*. 37(4), 528–546. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/anzf.1188>
- [29] Fremont, W.P., 2003. School refusal in children and adolescents. *American Family Physician*. 68(8), 1555–1561
- [30] King, N.J., Tonge, B.J., Heyne, D., et al., 1998. Cognitive-behavioral treatment of school-refusing children: A controlled evaluation. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*. 37(4), 395–403. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-199804000-00017>
- [31] Elliott, J.G., Place, M., 2019. Practitioner Review: School refusal: developments in conceptualisation and treatment since 2000. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. 60(1), 4–15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12848>
- [32] Heyne, D., King, N.J., Tonge, B.J., et al., 2001. School refusal: Epidemiology and management. *Paediatric Drugs*. 3, 719–732. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2165/00128072-200103100-00002>
- [33] Kearney, C.A., 2006. Dealing with school refusal behavior: A primer for family physicians: Workable solutions for unhappy youth and frustrated parents. *Journal of Family Practice*. 55(8), 685–693. Available from: <https://www.mdedge.com/familymedicine/article/62306/pediatrics/dealing-school-refusal-behavior-primer-family-physicians>.
- [34] Berg, I., 1992. Absence from school and mental health. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*. 161(2), 154–166. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.161.2.154>
- [35] Kearney, C.A., Silverman, W.K., 1995. Family environment of youngsters with school refusal behavior: A synopsis with implications for assessment and treatment. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*. 23(1), 59–72. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926189508251336>
- [36] Conway, C.A., Decker, L.B., Moffett, S.J., et al., 2022. Addressing Chronic School Absenteeism Through Intensive Home-Based Psychiatric Treatment: An Examination of the IICAPS Program. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. 1–12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-022-00839-3>
- [37] Place, M., Hulsmeier, J., Davis, S., et al., 2000. School refusal: A changing problem which requires a change of approach? *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. 5(3), 345–355. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104500005003005>
- [38] Havik, T., Bru, E., Ertesvåg, S.K., 2014. Parental perspectives of the role of school factors in school refusal. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*. 19(2), 131–153. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2013.816199>
- [39] Hart Barnett, J.E., Fisher, K.W., O’Connell, N., et al., 2019. Promoting upstander behavior to address bullying in schools. *Middle School Journal*. 50(1), 6–11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2018.1550377>
- [40] Vreeman, R.C., Carroll, A.E., 2007. A systematic review of school-based interventions to prevent bullying. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*. 161(1), 78–88. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.161.1.78>
- [41] Conroy, J.L., Conroy, P.M., Newman, R.J., 2006. School absence in children with fractures: Is it unnecessary school regulations that keep children away from school? *Injury*. 37(5), 398–401. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.injury.2006.01.008>

- [42] Mueller, D., Stoddard, C., 2006. Dealing with chronic absenteeism and its related consequences: The process and short-term effects of a diversionary juvenile court intervention. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*. 11(2), 199–219. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327671espr11025>
- [43] Heyne, D., King, N.J., Tonge, B.J., et al., 2002. Evaluation of child therapy and caregiver training in the treatment of school refusal. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*. 41(6), 687–695. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-200206000-00008>
- [44] Baker, M., Drange, N., Gjefsen, H.M., 2022. An evaluation of a national program to reduce student absenteeism in high school. National Bureau of Economic Research. No. 30194. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3386/w30194>
- [45] Ford, J., Sutphen, R.D., 1996. Early intervention to improve attendance in elementary school for at-risk children: A pilot program. *Children & Schools*. 18(2), 95–102. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/18.2.95>
- [46] Helm, C.M., Burkett, C.W., 1989. Effects of computer-assisted telecommunications on school attendance. *The Journal of Educational Research*. 82(6), 362–365. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.1989.10885919>
- [47] Maeda, N., Heyne, D., 2019. Rapid return for school refusal: A school-based approach applied with Japanese adolescents. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 10, 2862. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02862>
- [48] Burdick-Will, J., 2018. School location, social ties, and perceived neighborhood boundaries. *City & Community*. 17(2), 418–437. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/cico.12295>
- [49] Nuttall, C., Woods, K., 2013. Effective intervention for school refusal behaviour. *Educational Psychology in Practice*. 29(4), 347–366. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2013.846848>
- [50] Biag, M., Castrechini, S., 2016. Coordinated strategies to help the whole child: Examining the contributions of full-service community schools. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*. 21(3), 157–173. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2016.1172231>
- [51] Kim, J., Gentle-Genitty, C., 2020. Transformative school–community collaboration as a positive school climate to prevent school absenteeism. *Journal of Community Psychology*. 48(8), 2678–2691. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22444>
- [52] O'Donnell, J., Kirkner, S.L., 2014. Effects of an out-of-school program on urban high school youth's academic performance. *Journal of Community Psychology*. 42(2), 176–190. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.21603>
- [53] Reid, K., 2012. The strategic management of truancy and school absenteeism: Finding solutions from a national perspective. *Educational Review*. 64(2), 211–222. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2011.598918>
- [54] Tobias, A., 2019. A grounded theory study of family coach intervention with persistent school non-attenders. *Educational Psychology in Practice*. 35(1), 17–33. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2018.1518215>
- [55] Reissner, V., Knollmann, M., Spie, S., et al., 2019. Modular treatment for children and adolescents with problematic school absenteeism: Development and description of a program in Germany. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*. 26(1), 63–74. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2018.07.001>
- [56] McKay-Brown, L., McGrath, R., Dalton, L., et al., 2019. Reengagement with education: A multidisciplinary home-school-clinic approach developed in Australia for school-refusing youth. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*. 26(1), 92–106. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cbpra.2018.08.003>
- [57] Feyisa, M.B., Feyisa, A.B., Moreda, A.K., et al., 2022. The practices and challenges of conducting action research in some selected secondary schools of Bale Zone, Oromia, Ethiopia. *Educational Action Research*. 1–13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2021.1997778>
- [58] Huang, H.B., 2010. What is good action research. *Action Research*. 8(1), 93–109. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476750310362435>
- [59] Heron, J., Reason, P., 2008. Extending epistemology within a co-operative inquiry. 2, 366–380. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607934.n32>
- [60] Meyer, J., 2000. Using qualitative methods in health related action research. *BMJ*. 320(7228), 178–181. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.320.7228.178>
- [61] Lewin, K., 1948. Resolving social conflicts; selected papers on group dynamics. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/220420>
- [62] Smith, M.K., 2007. Action research. The encyclopedia of informal education. Available from: <https://www.infed.org/research/b-actres.htm>.
- [63] Wei, S., 2018. A Case Study of Psychotherapy for Children and Adolescents with School Refusal Behavior—An Exploration of Family-based Comprehensive Intervention Model [Dissertation]. Shaanxi University of Chinese Medical.
- [64] Chen, Y., 2016. Investigation of primary and secondary school students' School Refusal Behaviors in Guangzhou. *Chinese Mental Health Journal*. 30(2), 140–141. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1000-6729.2016.02.013>
- [65] Wai-yat NG, A., Yuen, M., De La Torre, J., 2022. Service learning online: Evaluation of a programme delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic in Hong Kong. *Pastoral Care in Education*. 1–16. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2022.2099004>
- [66] Wang, G., Zhang, Y., Zhao, J., et al., 2020. Mitigate

- the effects of home confinement on children during the COVID-19 outbreak. *The Lancet*. 395(10228), 945–947. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)30547-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30547-X)
- [67] Ciampo, L.A.D., Ciampo, I.R.L.D., 2021. Social isolation in times of COVID-19: Effects on adolescents' mental health. *Asian Journal of Pediatric Research*. 5(1), 13–18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajpr/2021/v5i130164>
- [68] Windarwati, H.D., Lestari, R., Supianto, A.A., et al., 2022. A narrative review into the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on senior high school adolescent mental health. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*. 35(3), 206–217. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcap.12370>
- [69] Ma, Z., Idris, S., Zhang, Y., et al., 2021. The impact of COVID-19 pandemic outbreak on education and mental health of Chinese children aged 7–15 years: An online survey. *BMC Pediatrics*. 21(1), 1–8. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12887-021-02550-1>
- [70] Shi, Y., 2018. The Study on Japanese Adolescents' Hikikomori Problem. *Youth Studies*. 47-58+95-96. Available from: https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=kT75Tk4425_wzbfEwmBtcyHshdH0ch0K_uufU0Z77SawHPmyhA9coS-Wna3lcht4lrX5zsZcktVHp06tn-OS4i7IWxeWoLn-oLth5X03Ftd35iCkQoPoR7xvTY2z7sVDwKeDWwN4fs.
- [71] Kearney, C.A., 2003. Bridging the Gap Among Professionals Who Address Youths With School Absenteeism: Overview and Suggestions for Consensus. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*. 34(1), 57–65. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.34.1.57>
- [72] Roué, A., Harf, A., Benoit, L., et al., 2021. Multifamily therapy for adolescents with school refusal: Perspectives of the adolescents and their parents. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*. 12, 624841. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.624841>
- [73] Norman, K.R., Silverman, W.K., Lebowitz, E.R., 2015. Family accommodation of child and adolescent anxiety: Mechanisms, assessment, and treatment. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*. 28(3), 131–140. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcap.12116>
- [74] Myers, S.S., Pianta, R.C., 2008. Developmental commentary: Individual and contextual influences on student–teacher relationships and children's early problem behaviors. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*. 37(3), 600–608. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15374410802148160>
- [75] Finning, K., Ukoumunne, O.C., Ford, T., et al., 2019. The association between anxiety and poor attendance at school—a systematic review. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*. 24(3), 205–216. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12322>
- [76] Gregory, I.R., Purcell, A., 2014. Extended school non-attenders' views: Developing best practice. *Educational Psychology in Practice*. 30(1), 37–50. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02667363.2013.869489>