

Psy-Connection Award 2013-14 Proposal

Project title: A Manga Series to Promote Mental Health Knowledge in Mainland and Hong Kong

Chen XIA, Kei FU (Fiona), Ching Man LAI (Eva)

Summary

Increasing mental health literacy has long been an important way to promote psychological well-being and reduce public, self-, and affiliate stigma attached to various psychological illnesses. Acknowledging the limited understanding of mental illnesses in Chinese societies, the goal of this project is two-fold. First, it aims to publicize the knowledge of psychological disorders through manga stories. In addition, it aims to facilitate the development of mental health services in Chinese societies through promoting mental health literacy in the community. Delivered through manga series and via popular social networks, the symptoms and causes of some common mental disorders, and biopsychosocial experiences of psychiatric patients could be presented to the folk, especially among the younger generation in an easily accessible manner.

Inspiration and Initiation

In 2012, the publication of a manga book called *Go Away, Mr. Cancer!* 《滾蛋吧，腫瘤君!》 immediately attracted public attention towards Mr. Xiong Dun, a Chinese young cartoonist who was diagnosed with Lymphoma. *Go Away, Mr. Cancer!* is Xiong's personal story. It narrates the psychological and physiological experiences of a cancer patient in a vivid and humorous tone, and has greatly moved many readers with the cartoonist's optimism and courage in front of death. The popularity of this manga book inspired one of our team members (Chen Xia) for the possibility to promote mental health in a similar format, she thereafter initiated the project.

Xiong's success could be attributed to both the positive spirit in her book as well as manga's efficiency in communicating information. Similar to the way Xiong introduces the treatments and disease stages of Lymphoma and strengthens people's faith of defeating cancer through her personal stories, we perceive the possibility of utilizing manga to promote mental health literacy and reduce stigma of mental illness by introducing real-life stories of people who suffered from mental illness.

Significance

"Mental disorders" have long been regarded as a taboo in traditional Chinese culture; public attitudes towards mental patients are often negative (Chou, Mak, Chung, Chan, & Ho, 1996). Despite the understanding of mental illness and acceptance to psychiatric patients have been improving (Chou & Mak, 1998), the service and concept of mental health are still at their infancy in mainland China. What makes the situation more worrying is that the training of mental health professionals is limited in mainland China; many certified counselors have not had any clinical experience throughout their training.

Perceivably, the health system could not be changed in a short time. Grounding on the concept of "consumer education" in marketing studies, promoting mental health knowledge may facilitate the development of mental health service in China. Apart from that, improving mental health literacy can help promote psychological well-being and facilitate early intervention for mental disorders.

Methodology

Apart from the *Go Away, Mr. Cancer!*, *Genius on the Left, Maniac on the Right* 《天才在左，瘋子在右》 is another successful online book presenting a serious and negatively perceived problem in a positive and encouraging way. The author of this book, Mr. Gao Ming, has spent years interviewing people with schizophrenia in order to collect and integrate interesting and meaningful stories into his book. This book enhances Chinese people's understanding of the living conditions and experience of Chinese patients with schizophrenia. Now there are over 1500 reviews of his comic book on douban.com, reflecting the popularity of the book.

Researchers have found that Chinese youngsters are particularly poorer on their knowledge about mental health problems, and should be prioritized for mental health education (Siu et al., 2012). Limited mental health literacy is one of the primary causes of stigmatization and discrimination, leading to increased psychological distress and burden to both the patients and their caregivers. The success of Gao's book implies that mental health can be one of the popular topics for Chinese youngsters and the Internet may be a good platform for psychoeducation. Taking all together, we believe that comic stories would be a feasible and effective way to promote psychological well-being and reduce stigma of mental illnesses in the community. Inspired by *Go Away, Mr. Cancer!* and *Genius on the Left, Maniac on the Right* and with the ambition to promote mental health, we would like to propose a project that aims to publicize the knowledge of mental disorders through manga stories.

Manga Series. In the beginning phase of this project, we will seek collaboration from the clinical psychology students at CUHK and a practicing psychiatrist in Shanghai (Dr. Gao Ju at Shanghai Changning Mental Health Center) to work together on this non-profit project. Through literature review, we will come up with a list of most common mental disorders in Mainland China and Hong Kong. We are going to include not only common mental disorders among adults, but also childhood disorders and disorders of old age. Then, we will try to create "prototype" cases that could best exemplify the symptoms and developmental stages for each of the psychological disorders. The creation of such "prototype" cases will rely on description and diagnostic criteria listed on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, as well as clinical experiences of the psychology students and psychiatrist. Once the stories are created, we are going to invite a recreational cartoonist (Fei Xing) to deliver the cases in the form of a manga series. Advanced pledge was obtained from Dr. Gao and Mr. Fei for their help on the project once the funding is granted.

Promotion. No medium nowadays could outperform the Internet in terms of the speed of communication and the scope of impact. For mainland Chinese readers, the manga series will be published on Sina Weibo, the most popular SNS in mainland China these days and spread posts among Weibo users. For Hong Kong readers, facebook will be the space for publication. Before the publication, our team members, as well as other professionals, will be invited to ensure the validity and credibility of the manga contents. If the manga series emerged to be successful, we may consider submitting it to local newspapers for publication.

Proposed Budget

Item	Expected expenditure (in HK\$)
Salary/ honorarium to the cartoonist	\$4000
Salary to helpers for editing and translation	\$1000

References

- Chou, K.-L., & Mak, K.-Y (1998). Attitudes To Mental Patients Among Hong Kong Chinese: a Trend Study Over Two Years. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 44(3), 215-224.
- Chou, K.-L., Mak, K.-Y., Chung, P.-K., Chan, D., & Ho, K. (1996). Attitudes Towards Mental Patients in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 42(3), 213-219.
- Siu, B. W. M., Chow, K. K. W., Lam, L. C. W., Chan, W. C., Tang, V. W. K., & Chui, W. W. H. (2012). A Questionnaire Survey on Attitudes and Understanding towards Mental Disorders. *East Asian Archives of Psychiatry*, 22(1), 18-24.

CUHK Psychology © 2014

Comments from the selection committee:

- An important issue to be addressed in an apparently efficient and effective way; a well-assembled team with a clear plan gives confidence that the proposed project will achieve its claimed aims quite well.
- A fun way to use magna to convey important messages to the public. It is not clear what the list of disorders you are going to address are. I would have expected that even at the proposal stage this desktop research could have been accomplished to see that you have seriously considered the ideas. It would be ideal if you could provide a story board of one disorder, however simplify that it could be, that we could see how disorders will not be presented as a caricature or stereotype. The idea is very good, just need a little more preparation work to see your intensity and expected output.

CUHK PSYCHOLOGY © 2014