

Study on the Transmission Paths and Driving Factors of Intergenerational Trauma in Educational Families: A Case Study of Beijing

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Abstract. The Intergenerational Trauma Cycle in Educational Families—where parents' education-related traumatic experiences are transmitted to children through genetic and behavioral imitation mechanisms, leading to similar psychological and behavioral issues during their educational process—undermines academic performance, triggers anxiety and low self-esteem, and exacerbates educational inequality. While existing studies predominantly focus on the negative impacts of trauma, they lack a systematic exploration of its transmission mechanisms and intervention pathways, particularly within Beijing's unique context. Using Beijing as a research sample, this study integrates Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory, Social Learning Theory, and the HITT model to map out pathways of trauma transmission and identify core driving factors. Three key transmission pathways are analyzed: psychological-behavioral, social-structural, and cultural-cognitive. Four core drivers are identified: pressure from the educational system, family cultural traditions, socio-economic stratification, and psychological cognition. Targeted interventions are proposed at the family, school, and policy/social levels. This study offers theoretical and practical insights for interrupting the intergenerational transmission of trauma, promoting educational equity, and fostering healthy family development.

Keywords: Intergenerational trauma in educational families, Transmission paths, Driving factors, Beijing area, Bourdieu's cultural capital theory.

1. Introduction

The intergenerational trauma cycle in educational families refers to the phenomenon where parents' education-related traumatic experiences are transmitted to their children through mechanisms such as genetics and behavioral imitation, leading to similar psychological and behavioral problems in children during their educational process. This cycle not only impairs children's academic performance and triggers emotional issues such as anxiety and low self-esteem but also creates a cross-generational vicious circle [1], emerging as a key factor that hinders individual development and exacerbates educational inequality [2]. With the increasing intensity of social competition and educational pressure, this issue has attracted widespread attention from both academic and policy circles.

Current studies mostly focus on the negative impacts of trauma, while there is insufficient systematic exploration of its transmission mechanisms and intervention strategies. In particular, there is a lack of targeted analysis on special contexts in Beijing, such as the monopoly of top high schools and the uneven distribution of educational resources [3].

Taking Beijing as the research sample, this study integrates Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory and Social Learning Theory to sort out the trauma transmission paths at the family, school, and social levels and identify core driving factors, including psychological traits and educational policies [1]. It aims to provide a theoretical basis and practical reference for the optimization of family education, the strengthening of school support, and the adjustment of educational policies, thereby helping to block intergenerational transmission and promote educational equity as well as the healthy development of families.

2. Research status of the intergenerational trauma cycle in educational families

2.1. Evolution of the theoretical basis for intergenerational trauma transmission

The early theory of intergenerational trauma was centered on psychoanalysis. For example, Freud put forward the concept of "intergenerational unconscious transmission." Later, Bourdieu's cultural capital theory explained how family cultural symbols carry and transmit trauma, and social learning theory supplemented the specific mechanism of behavioral imitation [4]. Recently, family systems theory has emphasized the impact of family interaction on the trauma cycle, thus forming a multi-theory interdisciplinary basic framework [5].

2.2. Progress of empirical research on the intergenerational trauma cycle in educational families

Most of the existing empirical studies focus on the trauma correlation between parents and children. For instance, some studies explore the transmission of parents' academic anxiety to their children. A few studies involve the influence of school factors (such as further education pressure) and social factors (such as uneven resource distribution). However, these studies are mostly single-dimensional analyses. There are relatively few special studies in the field of education, and there is a lack of targeted exploration of the special educational ecological regions, like Beijing [3].

2.3. Limitations and gaps in existing studies

Firstly, the analysis of the transmission mechanism is fragmented, and there is a lack of integrated research from the multi-dimensions of family, school, and society. Secondly, there is insufficient research on the special situations in Beijing, such as the monopoly of top high schools and the imbalance of regional educational resources. Thirdly, the intervention paths mostly focus on the individual psychological level, and there is less interaction with macro factors such as system and culture [6].

2.4. Construction of the theoretical framework of this study

This study integrates Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, social learning theory, and the HITT model to construct a multi-level analysis framework, addressing the limitations of existing studies and the need for localized analysis. Bourdieu's theory provides a sociological basis for understanding how educational trauma is transmitted between generations through cultural capital. From the perspective

of behavioral imitation and reinforcement mechanisms, social learning theory explains the acquisition and reproduction process of traumatic parenting styles. The HITT model further introduces family resilience as a moderating variable, which includes protective mechanisms such as trauma narrative reconstruction, adaptive communication, and cross-generational support. It provides an empirical basis for analyzing the intergenerational buffer path under educational pressure. This integrated framework not only makes up for the insufficient explanatory power of existing theories on the unique phenomena of Chinese education but also provides systematic theoretical guidance for in-depth analysis of the transmission mechanism of intergenerational trauma in educational families in Beijing from the three levels of family, school, and society.

Based on the above-mentioned theoretical framework and aiming to address the limitations of existing studies, such as the lack of multi-dimensional integration and regional particularity, this study will focus on analyzing the specific transmission paths of intergenerational trauma in educational families in Beijing from three dimensions: psychological-behavioral, social-structural, and cultural-cognitive. This analytical framework corresponds to the micro-interaction between individuals and families, the meso-level educational policies and resource structures, and the macro-level cultural values and social concepts, respectively. It aims to systematically reveal the complex mechanism of trauma formation and reproduction and lay a foundation for identifying the core driving factors and putting forward blocking strategies in the follow-up research.

3. Transmission paths of intergenerational trauma in educational families in Beijing

3.1. Psychological-behavioral transmission path

The psychological-behavioral transmission of intergenerational trauma in educational families in Beijing starts with the unrepaired educational trauma of parents, such as their failure in the college entrance examination or regrets about further education. In addition, regional cognitive biases, such as the elite expectations of highly educated families and the identity anxiety of new Beijingers, further increase the psychological pressure of parents. Parents transmit anxiety through daily negative words and deeds, such as complaining about scores and comparing with "children from famous schools," and children imitate such stress-response behaviors through observation. At the same time, in the parent-child interaction, the patterns of over-supervising children's learning and denying their emotions make children internalize the cognition that "educational failure is life failure." Gradually, children show traumatic symptoms such as inferiority and school weariness and finally form the intergenerational transmission of trauma [7].

3.2. Social-structural transmission path

More than 90% of primary and secondary schools in Haidian District have been incorporated into the group-based school-running system, and subject competitions are linked to the "school quota admission" policy, which has intensified educational competition. The monthly average educational expenditure of participating families has increased sharply, and parents' anxiety has risen. This evidence confirms the conclusion of Fang Changchun and others that the institutional resource allocation strengthens the pressure [8]. Beijing's non-local registered families face increased educational costs and limited access to high-quality resources. Parents transmit their sense of powerlessness to their children, thereby reducing their sense of security. After the implementation of the "Double Reduction" policy, offline training institutions have been rectified, but one-on-one

private tutoring has expanded. The lack of community educational resources has led to the transfer and continuation of anxiety, and the policy effect has not met expectations [9].

3.3. Cultural-cognitive transmission path

Elite values such as "worship of Tsinghua and Peking University" are driven by the Confucian tradition of "learning for officialdom" and the preferential policies for top universities. Families in Beijing regard it as a core way to prevent the decline of social status. The excessive connection between academic studies and family status has led to the alienation of family relationships [10]. Studies by Li Jun and others show that families in Beijing generally link their children's academic performance with their values and transmit the distorted logic of "excellence equals recognition" through daily interactions [11]. Among the families of migrant children in Beijing, parents rationalize the pressure by saying that "studying in rural areas is harder." Children's academic self-efficacy negatively correlates with the frequency of such narratives, creating a closed loop of "trauma rationalization-pressure internalization." Moreover, this kind of narrative also diverts parents' attention from their children's needs, thus ignoring them [12].

4. Analysis of core driving factors in Beijing

4.1. Educational system driving factors

4.1.1. Examination-oriented evaluation pressure

The school evaluation system dominated by standardized tests and promotion rates affects family choices through the intergenerational educational transmission mechanism. Based on micro-surveys, Wu Yiping and You Yu pointed out that, affected by their examination experiences, parents will pass on the cognition of "scores first" to the next generation, resulting in families ignoring the all-round development of children. Under the junior high school and senior high school diversion mechanism, parents' "elimination anxiety" is transformed into strict academic requirements, and the intergenerational transmission of trauma is promoted through daily supervision [13].

4.1.2. Unintended consequences of the "Double Reduction" policy

Although the "Double Reduction" policy has reduced the amount of after-school homework in schools, the academic burden has been transferred to private tutoring and parental tutoring. The policy's regulation of off-campus training institutions has reshaped the pattern of the education industry, but it has also given rise to hidden services such as high-priced private tutoring and one-on-one tutoring, which have increased the hidden costs of family education. In addition, the supervision rules for "quality education" courses are not perfect, and some institutions have launched high-fee projects in the name of quality education, which has aggravated educational anxiety and failed to curb traumatic competition [9].

4.2. Family culture driving factors

4.2.1. Link between national and family honor and academic performance

The concept of "family honor" in Confucian culture has profoundly shaped the family upbringing logic, making children's academic success a core means to maintain the family's social status and

avoid the decline of social class. In this cultural context, families generally link their children's admission to top universities with "family reputation." Although families from different social classes invest varying amounts in upbringing, all families consider academic performance a crucial standard for assessing their children's value. Furthermore, daily interactions during upbringing strengthen intergenerational anxiety and increase academic pressure on children [10].

4.2.2. Cultural shaping of elite cities

A cooperative study by Chinese and Ukrainian scholars pointed out from a cross-cultural perspective that as a core gathering place of educational resources in China, Beijing's regional culture has a significant shaping effect on family upbringing cognition. Affected by the urban elite culture, highly educated families generally regard "studying in famous schools" as the "default path" for their children's growth. Their expectations for their children's academic performance are significantly higher than those of families in other cities in China. By strengthening academic requirements, they transmit survival anxiety, thereby accelerating the intergenerational transmission of educational trauma [14].

4.3. Socio-economic driving factors

4.3.1. Anxiety about class decline and educational investment

Families from different social classes invest significantly differently in their children's upbringing. To prevent their children from falling into a lower class, middle-class families regard education as the "core way to stabilize their class status" and tend to over-invest in competitive educational resources. This upbringing choice based on class differences further intensifies the competition for educational resources and increases family anxiety [11]. Such strategic investments often prioritize academic performance over holistic development, potentially exacerbating intergenerational pressures and psychological burdens on children.

4.3.2. High educational costs and return anxiety

Families of migrant children in Beijing face more prominent educational and economic pressures. The rising costs of tutoring and school district housing have squeezed the family's economic space. Parents are increasingly concerned about the conversion of their educational investment into academic returns. Children often transmit this anxiety about "wasted investment" through daily complaints, thereby increasing the psychological burden of their studies [12]. This dynamic may lead to a cycle of intergenerational stress where financial sacrifices intensify performance expectations and further exacerbate children's academic anxiety.

4.4. Psychological cognition driving factors

4.4.1. Unresolved trauma and intergenerational compensation

The differences in parenting styles among parents of different classes will affect the transmission path of trauma. Some parents, due to their unresolved academic setbacks during their growth, integrate the psychology of "intergenerational compensation" into their parenting behaviors. These parents demand that their children achieve the academic goals they themselves were unable to fulfill, often through excessive control. This kind of behavior is easily internalized by children as

self-criticism of "failure if they fail to meet the requirements," which strengthens the perception of trauma [11].

4.4.2. Cognitive biases towards quality education

Families of different classes generally have parenting cognitive biases. Some parents equate quality education with "academic supplement" and ignore its value for the all-round development of children. At the same time, they have a misunderstanding that happy education "will lead to slack in academic studies." Especially among the families of migrant children in Beijing, due to the worry about their children's academic competitiveness, parents are more inclined to equate "admission to top universities" with "success." This single cognitive distortion of the evaluation standard for children's development further increases the psychological pressure of children's studies [11, 12].

Based on the analysis of the core driving factors of educational intergenerational trauma in Beijing, namely educational system pressure, family cultural tradition, socio-economic stratification, and psychological cognitive model, this study further puts forward the following targeted intervention paths and systematic strategy suggestions from the three levels of family, school, and social policy so as to fundamentally block the intergenerational cycle of trauma.

5. Intervention paths and strategy suggestions in Beijing

5.1. Family level: optimization of trauma cognition and parenting styles

Through intergenerational trauma identification workshops, help parents realize their trauma transmission behaviors. Set up intergenerational influence cognition courses to improve parents' understanding of how trauma shapes parenting styles. Organize parent-child communication seminars to teach empathetic listening skills and reduce trauma caused by conflicts. Additionally, incorporate experiential activities and role-playing exercises to enhance emotional awareness and self-reflection among parents. These efforts can further promote a supportive family environment and contribute to breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma.

Promotion of Democratic Parenting Styles. Promote the transformation of parenting styles from authoritative to democratic, and cultivate children's autonomy to reduce their academic pressure. Promote positive parenting practices, such as offering regular affirmations and emotional support, which can enhance children's psychological resilience. Strengthen the emotional connection between parents and children to reduce the impact of potential trauma. Encourage collaborative decision-making processes within the family to foster mutual respect and shared responsibility. Regularly assess and adjust parenting approaches based on children's feedback and developmental needs to ensure a healthy and adaptive family dynamic.

5.2. School level: teacher empowerment and curriculum reform

Development of Trauma-Informed Education Training. Carry out trauma-informed education training to improve teachers' ability to identify students' trauma at an early stage. Establish early intervention mechanisms, such as classroom inspections, to intervene before the trauma worsens. Enhance teachers' intervention skills to provide timely support for high-risk students. Incorporate scenario-based simulations and case studies into training programs to help educators practice responsive and adaptive support strategies. Furthermore, create collaborative networks among schools, mental health professionals, and community resources to ensure sustained and comprehensive support for affected students.

Integration of Mental Health Education Courses. Improve the stress management curriculum and introduce empirically effective modules such as mindfulness training and emotional regulation. Enhance career planning education to assist students in overcoming the belief that only prestigious schools lead to success. Regularly carry out group training on stress coping to improve students' psychological adjustment ability in academic competition and alleviate stress trauma [15]. Incorporate age-appropriate mental health literacy content to help students better understand and express their emotional needs.

5.3. Policy and social level: system support and atmosphere creation

Optimization of Educational Resource Layout. Promote the balanced allocation of resources, such as teacher rotation, to narrow the gap between famous schools and ordinary schools. Establish a diversified evaluation system including extracurricular achievements to alleviate the pressure of examination-oriented education. Expand further education channels, such as vocational education, to reduce dependence on the college entrance examination. Additionally, increase investment in digital education infrastructure to ensure equitable access to high-quality educational resources across all regions.

Construction of a Multi-Level Health Support System. Improve the community parent schools to provide convenient trauma-informed parenting guidance. Establish a professional counseling service system to provide ongoing mental health support for families. Popularize peer support groups to promote experience sharing among families with trauma. Develop digital platforms and mobile applications to increase accessibility of resources and remote support options. Furthermore, establish partnerships with local mental health institutions and social workers to provide specialized interventions and long-term follow-up services for vulnerable families.

Positive Guidance through Media Publicity. Through the media, spread the diversified success standards, such as professional achievements in non-academic fields, to break the elite bias. Shape the image of healthy families that attach importance to emotional connection to guide public cognition. Popularize scientific concepts such as child-centered education to reduce traumatic parenting behaviors. Collaborate with influencers and educational experts to produce relatable content that showcases real-life examples of holistic development and mental well-being. Utilize social media campaigns and public service announcements to reach a wider audience and normalize discussions around emotional health and balanced upbringing.

Creation of a "Relaxed" Social Atmosphere. Cultivate an inclusive culture to reduce the excessive comparison of children's academic performance. Weaken the "comparison culture" in communities and workplaces to alleviate parents' anxiety. Establish a rational educational concept of "valuing growth over results" to build a social environment resistant to trauma. Encourage community activities and public discussions that emphasize diverse developmental pathways and personal strengths beyond academic metrics.

6. Conclusion

This study has analyzed the intergenerational transmission of educational trauma within families in Beijing through three core pathways: psychological-behavioral, social-structural, and cultural-cognitive. Four key drivers were identified: pressure from the examination-oriented educational system, family cultural traditions emphasizing academic honor, socio-economic stratification, and unresolved psychological cognition among parents.

The findings highlight the critical need for multi-level interventions to break this self-reinforcing cycle. At the family level, promoting parental awareness of trauma transmission and adopting democratic parenting practices are essential. Schools should integrate trauma-informed teacher training and mental health education into curricula to build students' resilience. On a broader scale, policy adjustments—such as optimizing resource allocation, diversifying evaluation systems, and strengthening community-based counseling services—are vital to reduce structural pressures. Media and public campaigns should also help cultivate a more inclusive social atmosphere that values holistic development over narrow academic achievement.

This research provides a theoretical and practical foundation for addressing intergenerational educational trauma in Beijing. The integrated framework and context-specific strategies offer insights that may also inform interventions in other regions facing similar challenges. Future studies could expand this approach through comparative regional analyses or longitudinal designs to further validate and refine these intervention models.

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