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## Causes and Countermeasures of Mental Health Problems of Lahu Youth and Children

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### Abstract

This study examines the mental health challenges faced by Lahu teenagers and children in Lancang County using an Explanatory Sequential Design within a mixed-methods framework. The research integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches, beginning with a literature review and questionnaire survey to identify the prevalence of mental health issues, followed by in-depth interviews to explore their underlying causes. The findings reveal that mental health problems among Lahu adolescents are influenced by various factors, including economic underdevelopment, inadequate family supervision, cultural traditions, and ethnic characteristics. To address these challenges, the study proposes targeted interventions such as enhancing economic conditions, addressing issues related to left-behind children, improving school-based psychological education facilities and staffing, establishing a family-school-community collaboration mechanism, promoting mental health education, and developing a culturally sensitive psychological support system. These measures aim to enhance the mental well-being of students in ethnic regions and foster their holistic development.

**Keywords:** Lahu ethnic, Mental health, Adolescent children

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## 1. Introduction

With the development of society, the issue of adolescent mental health is receiving more and more attention. Domestic-related research data show that the number of junior and senior high school students with a tendency to mental illness accounts for about 12%-20% (Yang, 2016; Jing, 2024), and some studies have

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found results as high as 28% (Xiaohui et al., 2024), and in recent years, the incidence of psychological problems among secondary school students has counseled a gradual upward trend (Li, 2005; Lei et al., 2011). Adolescents' socialization level is relatively low, their self-consciousness is still immature, and their ability to resist difficulties and risks is insufficient, so they are more prone to various psychological problems when facing complex school and social life (Goodwin et al., 2021; Gage and Patalay, 2021). And in remote ethnic areas where development is relatively backward, due to their cultural, social, and economic uniqueness, adolescents face a more complicated growing environment, and mental health problems are more prominent (Jiangnan et al., 2014; Liao et al., 2015).

As a province with the largest variety of ethnic minorities, the proportion of its ethnic minority students is as high as 39% (Yunnan Provincial Department of Education, 2024), while the need for mental health education for minority students has not been given enough attention. Lahu, as one of the ethnic minorities in China's Yunnan Province, the mental health problems faced by its adolescents in the process of growing up are not only related to their personal development but also have a far-reaching impact on the social stability and progress of the entire ethnic region. By analyzing the current situation of Lahu students' mental health, its causes, and possible countermeasures, this paper proposes how to strengthen the psychological care of minority students in school education to promote their healthy growth and comprehensive development.

### **1.1. Reflections from a Return Visit to the "Lahu Girls' Class" Twenty Years Later**

The Lahu have a long history and rich cultural traditions and are famous for their unique costumes, songs, and dances. The ethnic group originated from the ancient Qiang lineage, has its native language, and is now mainly distributed in Lincang, Pu'er, Nujiang, and other places in western Yunnan Province. About two thousand years ago, a branch of the ancient Qiang people left the Himalayas and came to the Mengjia (Wang and Shaoying, 1999) mountainous area on the present China-Burma border, forming the Lahu ethnic group (Yunnan Ethnic Affairs Commission, 1999; Zhang, 2023). Constrained by multiple factors such as geography, economic situation, history, and culture, their living conditions are relatively backward, and the Lahu people of Mengjia Township, Lancang Lahu Autonomous County, to this day, still take the cultivation of rice, maize, tea, and the operation of animal husbandry as their main way of life.

At the beginning of this century, the Lahu people in Mengjia counseling were still living in isolation, and the progress of modernization was therefore very slow. Of course, the lack of transport was not the only factor that hindered their progress, and there were many difficulties in modernizing the Lahu. 2001, Professor Teng Xing, to promote the modernization of the Lahu, initiated a project entitled "Research on the Problem of Missing and Dropping Out of School for Lahu Girls in Lancang, Yunnan Province, China", and established a Chinese language teaching boarding class for 46 Lahu girls in Mengjia Township. He set up a Chinese teaching boarding class for 46 Lahu girls in Mengjia Township, helping them to better integrate into the modern mainstream society by teaching them Chinese and hoping that the development of girls' education would lead to the modernization and development of the local community. More than twenty years later, in addition to visiting the living conditions of the "girls' class", the author has discovered new problems through researching many local primary and secondary schools.

In one of the primary schools visited, the composition of the student body is very special, with orphans accounting for 2.8% of the total number of students, single-parent families accounting for 15.27% of the total number of students, and left-behind children accounting for 13.7% of the total number of students, which makes it extremely difficult to educate them. With the development of the economic regions in ethnic areas and the implementation of nine-year compulsory education, coupled with the State's policy of exempting miscellaneous school fees and providing living allowances, children in Lancang Lahu Autonomous County are now less likely to be unable to afford to go to school due to financial problems than they were twenty years ago, but the problem of boredom with school still exists, and there have been a few cases of students committing suicide due to psychological problems. These phenomena are heartbreaking, and have also triggered the author's thinking, what leads to the serious psychological problems of Lahu youth and children? And how to solve these problems?

## 2. Literature Review

Concerning the mental health of young children and adolescents in ethnic minority areas, scholars have carried out research in various aspects, the content of which is mainly focused on three aspects. Firstly, the current situation of mental health education for adolescents in ethnic areas. Based on the empirical research in Guangxi border counties (cities and districts), Zhang Jinqing found that the current psychological health education in small-scale rural schools in border ethnic areas faces such realistic dilemmas as the low rate of psychological counseling rooms and the lack of adequate facilities, the weak strength of teachers in psychological health education, and the inadequate mechanism of collaboration between families, schools, and communities (Sun, 2012). Most of the young parents in the farming and herding villages in ethnic minority areas go out to work, and left-behind children lack parental discipline, which makes them prone to develop a withdrawn mentality, leading to deviations in their outlook on life and values, as well as problems with improper attitudes towards learning (Wang, 2021). Secondly, it is the research on the causes and countermeasures of mental health problems of young children in ethnic areas. Scholars have analyzed the causes of students' psychological problems from the management mode of schools (Yang et al., 2017), their factors, family influence, school education, and social environment (Li and Yin, 2012). For different situations, scholars put forward many countermeasures, such as the establishment of "left-behind children" files for specialists, enrichment of campus cultural activities (Huang, 2021); insisting on the combination of individual and group counseling, and paying attention to parent-child education (Li et al., 2004); attaching importance to the negative impact of poverty on their mental health and integrating mental health education into the track of quality education for national students, and attaching importance to cultural change education, and paying attention to the development of the mental health education for national students. Quality education track, paying attention to the impact of cultural changes on ethnic minority students, etc. (Zhao et al., 2020). Thirdly, it is the research on the special situation of ethnic minority areas. For example, it analyses the mental health condition of secondary school students in ethnic minority areas under the perspective of a school running in a different place (Yan and Zhang, 2013), and studies the psychological adaptation of ethnic minority eco-immigrants after relocating to a different place (Li et al., 2000). Specifically on the mental health of Lahu children, scholars Li Wenquan and Shang et al. (2000) took Lahu junior high school students and primary school students as the research objects respectively, compared them with Han Chinese and students in other regions, and found that Lahu primary and secondary school students have more serious psychological problems, and put forward relevant countermeasure suggestions (Shang et al., 2000; Yao et al., 1995).

In addition to that, associated with the research of this paper, some studies specifically focus on the suicidal behavior of the Lahu people. By analyzing the suicide phenomenon of Lahu people in Weilang Village, Fubang Tcounselingship, Lancang County, Yunnan Province, Yao et al. (1995) found that the suicides were mainly concentrated in the age group of 11-30 years old, with drug taking as the main way, and the study concluded that extramarital love affairs and emotional problems were the main causes of suicide (Chen et al., 2002). Similarly, the survey of Chen et al. (2002) also shows that the suicide rate of Lahu is higher, and the love problem is an important causative factor of suicide, at the same time, the influence of imitation learning and folklore and religious beliefs cannot be ignored. Zhou (2008), on the other hand, analyzed the suicide psychology of Lahu and Naxi from a cross-cultural perspective and concluded that their suicidal behaviors are related to their traditional culture and national character, but the direct cause of suicidal behaviors is still the suicidal person's psychological characteristics (Teng and Yang, 2004). There are also some investigations and analyses on the reasons for the low academic achievement of Lahu students (Li, 2013; Wang, 2010), or studies on the review and reflection on the problems of Lahu education (Yang, 2007; National Bureau of Statistics, 2024), which, although not directly related to the research topic of this paper, provide useful references, and inspire the author to think about the reasons for the psychological problems of the Lahu adolescents in many ways.

This review focuses on the mental health problems of children and adolescents in ethnic areas, especially the psychological conditions of Lahu children and adolescents in Lancang County. From the existing research literature, less attention has been paid to the mental health of children and adolescents in ethnic areas of China, especially in border ethnic areas. The mental health of adolescents in ethnic areas is affected by a variety of factors, including family economic difficulties, insufficient educational resources, and lack of family

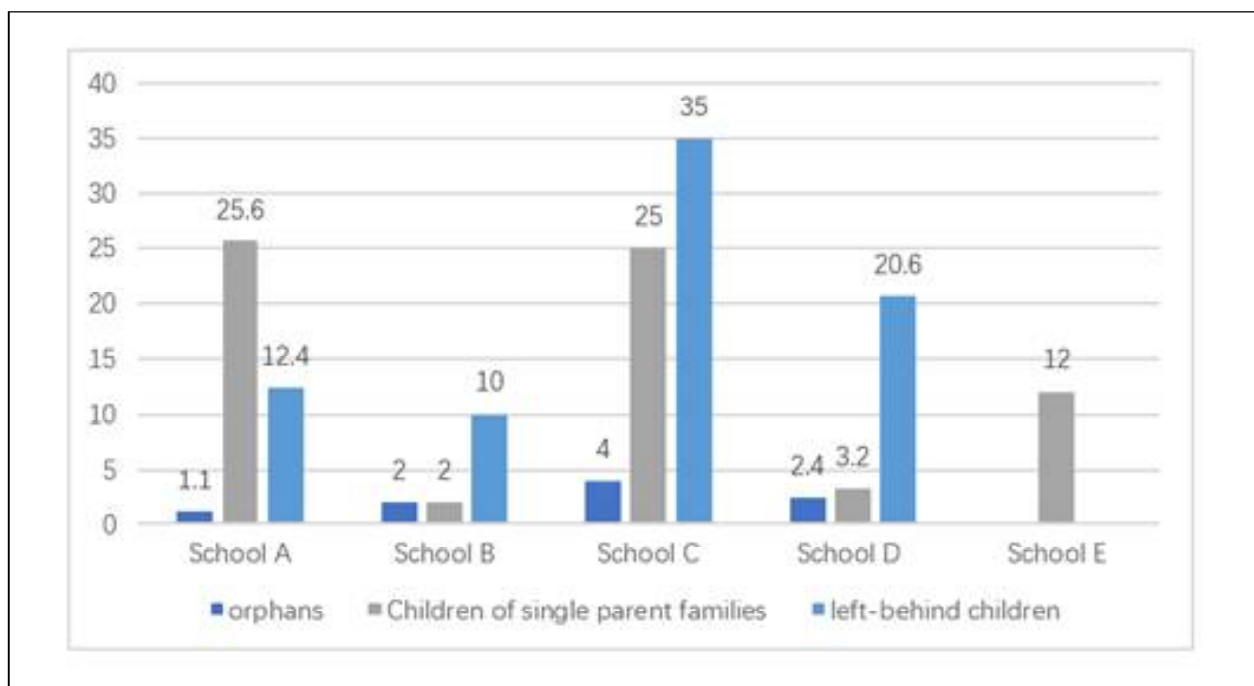
and community support, etc. In addition to the above-mentioned factors, Lahu children also face some special problems due to their cultural background. Previous studies on Lahu suicidal behaviors and educational problems have highlighted the seriousness of psychological problems from the side and pointed out the far-reaching impact of cultural changes, folk and religious beliefs, and the concept of marriage on mental health, which provides ideas for understanding the cultural dimension of Lahu youth's psychological problems.

Most studies on the mental health problems of Lahu adolescents have focused on individual topics, lacked systematic analyses, and failed to adequately explore the multidimensional causes of the psychological problems of this group. Although previous researchers have revealed the seriousness and specificity of the psychological problems of Lahu adolescents and provided a factual basis and a preliminary theoretical framework for subsequent studies, the breadth and depth of the studies are insufficient, and after more than two decades, they are not sufficiently current. What is the current situation of mental health of Lahu adolescents and children? What dilemmas exist? And how to solve these dilemmas? All these questions need to be studied in depth.

### 3. The Current Situation of Mental Health Problems of Lahu Primary and Secondary School Students

In the process of tracking the "Lahu Girls' Classes" in Lancang County, it was found that the local Lahu primary and secondary school students generally have serious psychological problems, a phenomenon that aroused the author's great concern. To further understand the manifestations and underlying causes of the problems, the author conducted questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews with the headmasters and teachers of several local schools. By synthesizing the questionnaire data and interview results, this paper will show the current situation of Lahu students' mental health, analyze the causes of its formation, and provide reference suggestions for improving the mental health problems of students in ethnic areas.

A total of 406 valid questionnaires were collected, covering headmasters and teachers of more than ten primary and secondary schools in Lancang Lahu Autonomous County, including Laba, Dzutang, Menglang, and other counseling services. The majority of the students in the surveyed schools are ethnic minority students, and the proportion of Lahu students in many schools is very high, reaching 30%, 76%, 82%, and 89.6% respectively. Among them, the author interviewed school A-E headmasters to get data on the percentage of children with special needs in their schools, as shown in the Figure 1.

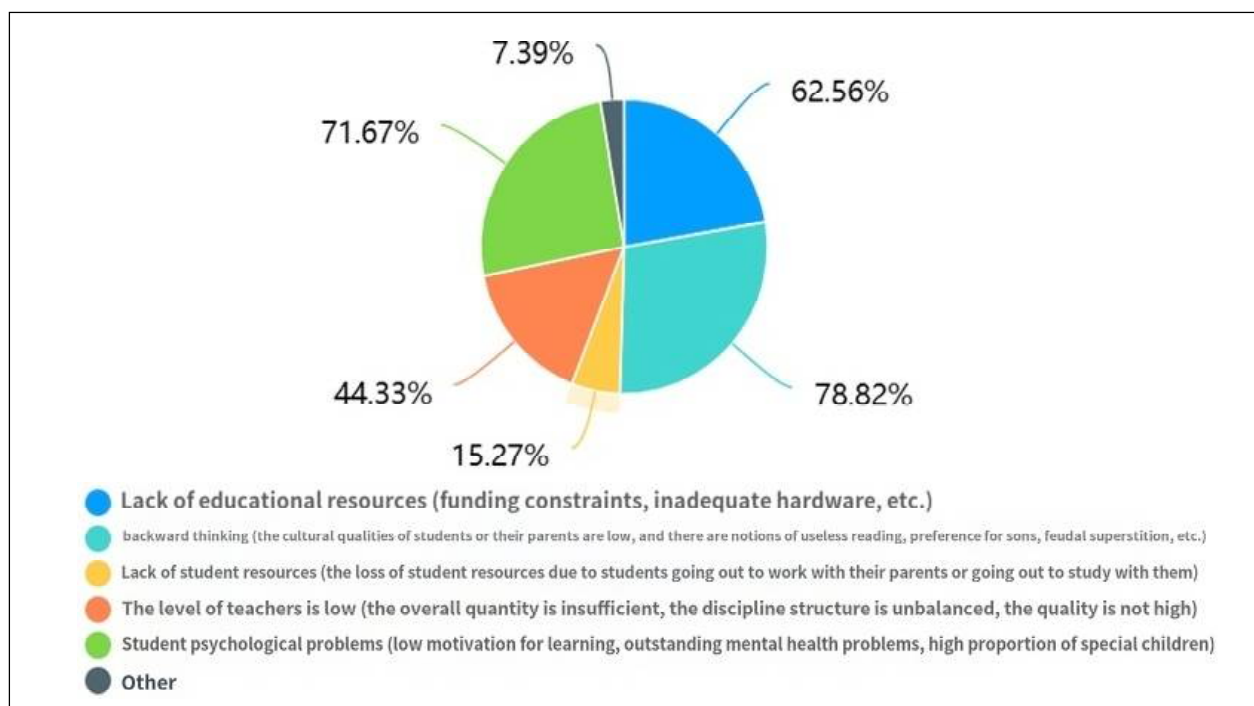


**Figure 1: Chart of the Percentage of Children with Special Needs in Schools A-E (in Percent)**

**Note:** School E data for orphans, children from single-parent families, and left-behind children total 12%.

As can be seen from the above chart, the percentage of children with special needs in these schools is very high, with 25% and 35% of children from single-parent families and children left behind. This is an astonishing figure and one that shows the difficulty of teaching and learning in these schools.

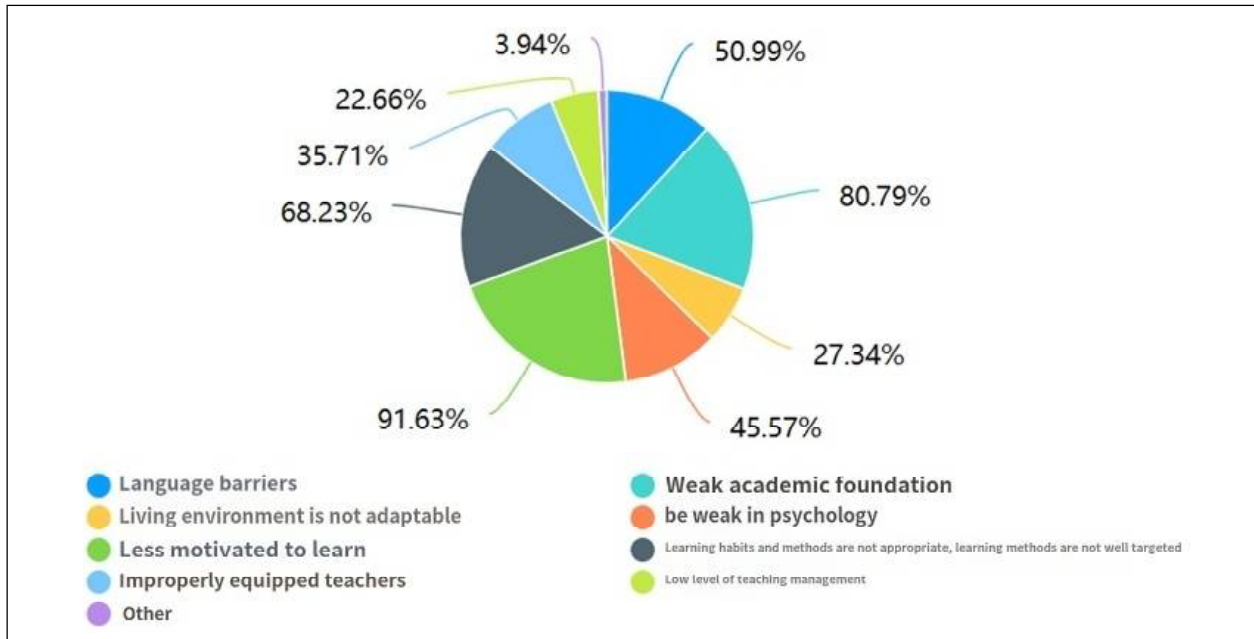
In response to the question “What difficulties does your school face (multiple choice)”, 78.82% of the respondents chose “backward ideological concepts (low cultural quality of students or their parents, the existence of the concepts of uselessness of studying, preference for boys over girls, and feudal superstitions)”, 71.67% chose “students’ psychological problems (low motivation for learning, prominent mental health problems, and the high proportion of special children)”, and 62.56% chose “students’ psychological problems (low motivation for learning, prominent mental health problems, and the high proportion of special children)”. 71.67% of the respondents chose “students’ psychological problems (students’ low motivation to learn, outstanding mental health problems, the proportion of children with special needs, etc.)”, 62.56% of the respondents chose “lack of educational resources (funding constraints, hardware facilities, etc.)”, 62.56% of the respondents chose “lack of educational resources (funding constraints, hardware facilities, etc.)”. In addition, “low level of teaching staff (overall insufficient number, imbalance in subject structure, poor quality, etc.)” is also one of the most important problems faced by schools (44.33%) (Figure 2).



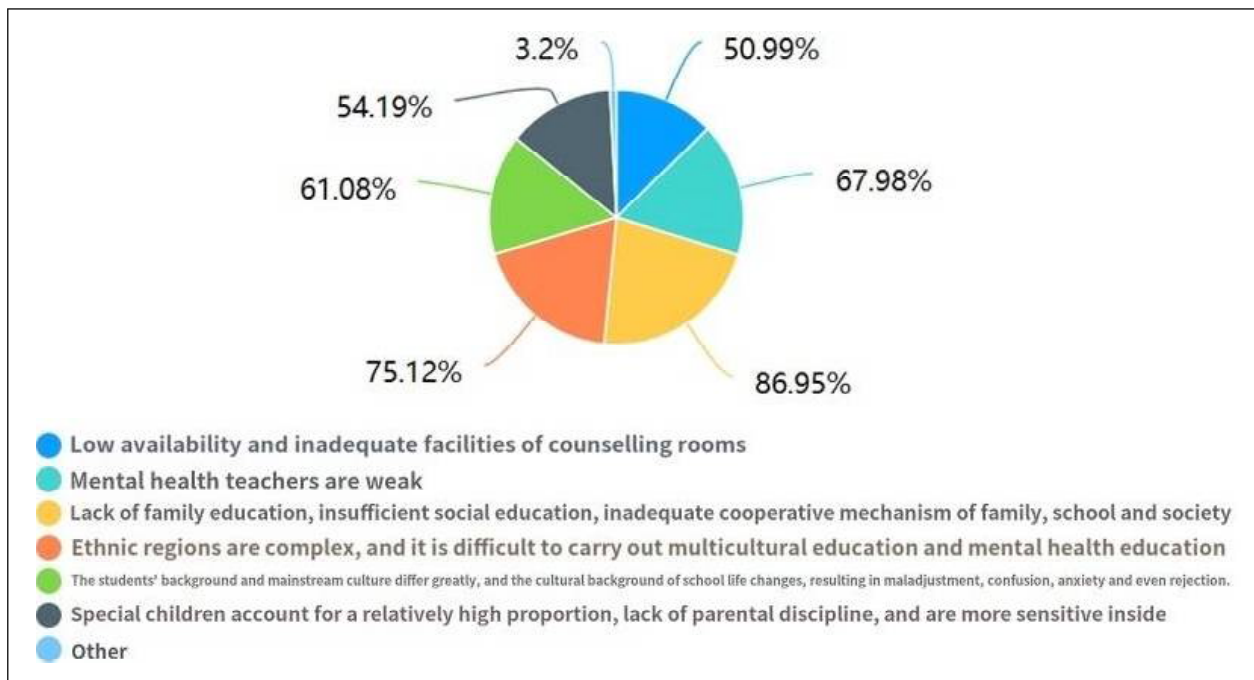
**Figure 2: Responses to the Question “What Difficulties Does Your School Face (Multiple Choice)?”**

Among the factors affecting students’ academic performance, 91.63% of the respondents considered “students’ low motivation to study” to be the main factor, followed by weak academic foundations (80.79%) and students’ study habits and methods (68.23%). At the same time, language communication barriers (50.99%) and weak psychological qualities (45.57%) are also important factors, indicating that students also face greater difficulties at the linguistic and psychological levels (Figure 3).

In terms of mental health, 86.95% of the respondents identified the lack of family education, insufficient social education, and inadequate synergistic mechanisms between family, school, and society as the most significant problems. Secondly, the complexity of ethnic geography (75.12%) and the large differences between students’ backgrounds and the mainstream culture (61.08%) indicate that the problems of cultural adaptation and social integration profoundly affect the development of students’ mental health. What is even more worrying is that the percentage of special children in schools is very high (54.19%), but there is a shortage of teachers for mental health education (67.98%) and a low rate of construction of counseling rooms (50.99%), a contradiction that is likely to lead to a lack of effective interventions in schools to deal with psychological problems, making the psychological problems of students even more pronounced and difficult to solve (Figure 4).



**Figure 3: Responses to the Question “What Do You Consider to be the Main Factors Affecting Students’ Academic Performance (Multiple Choice)”**



**Figure 4: Responses to the Question “What Do You Think are the Main Factors Affecting Students’ Mental Health (Multiple Choice)?”**

Survey data show that some schools in Lancang Lahu Autonomous County have an extremely high percentage of special children (including orphans, children from single-parent families, and left-behind children), with the highest percentage even reaching over 60%. This phenomenon not only directly increases the complexity of school management and teaching, but also exacerbates students’ psychological problems and academic difficulties. At the same time, these schools face many problems such as insufficient educational resources, the backwardness of local people’s mentality, and students’ psychological burdens are aggravated by the lack of family education and the cultural and social pressures they face. In addition, it is not only the survey data that reveals these heartbreaking problems, but also the lack of teachers, students’ boredom with school, lack of parental control, and psychological problems, which were the most frequently mentioned in face-to-face interviews with local school headmasters.

In interviews with local school headmasters, they also mentioned the serious shortage of facilities for mental health education in schools, and even though some schools have psychological counseling rooms, the facilities are not well equipped to provide effective psychological counseling for students. The number of teachers of mental health education is extremely short, most do not have a full-time psychological teacher, but by other teachers, many teachers have not studied systematic knowledge of psychology, dealing with students' mental health problems is often more than enough but not enough. Moreover, even with a high level of psychological literacy, if they do not have a deep understanding of the cultural background and upbringing of these students, it will be difficult to prescribe the right remedy. At the same time, the lack of family education is also a major problem faced by schools. Many parents believe that schools should have full control over the education of their students, thus neglecting internal family education. This situation was also mentioned by many headmasters during the interviews. There are many left-behind children in schools, who lack effective family supervision, are in their formative years, lack rational discernment, and are susceptible to the influence of negative social information, false statements, and bad customs. Especially nowadays, with the development of the Internet and the prevalence of short videos, they are easily guided by undesirable guidance, which leads to confusion, anxiety, and an aversion to learning.

Overall, the difficulties in delivering mental health education in these schools can be summarized in the following three areas:

- High proportion of children with special needs and outstanding mental health problems: The high proportion of children with special needs directly leads to the diversification and complexity of the types of psychological problems among students, which poses a higher challenge to mental health education in schools.
- Inadequate school counseling facilities and a shortage of teachers: The lack of counseling facilities and the shortage of teachers limit the ability of schools to respond to psychological problems, leaving many students without timely and effective intervention for their psychological needs.
- Inadequate school, family, and social synergy mechanisms: the inadequacy of the tripartite linkage mechanism among families, schools and society has made mental health education detached from the social support system and unable to form a synergy, which is particularly unfavorable to the growth and adaptation of students.

Taken together, these problems are related, and they not only affect students' academic performance but also exacerbate the complexity of mental health problems, which together constrain the advancement of mental health education in schools. Mental health problems not only affect students' academic performance but are also closely related to family, cultural adaptation, and social support mechanisms. An in-depth study of the psychological problems of local students, mainly Lahu children, and an exploration of their causes can help to comprehensively understand the complexity of education in Lahu ethnic areas and provide more targeted support for students, thereby promoting educational equity and individual development.

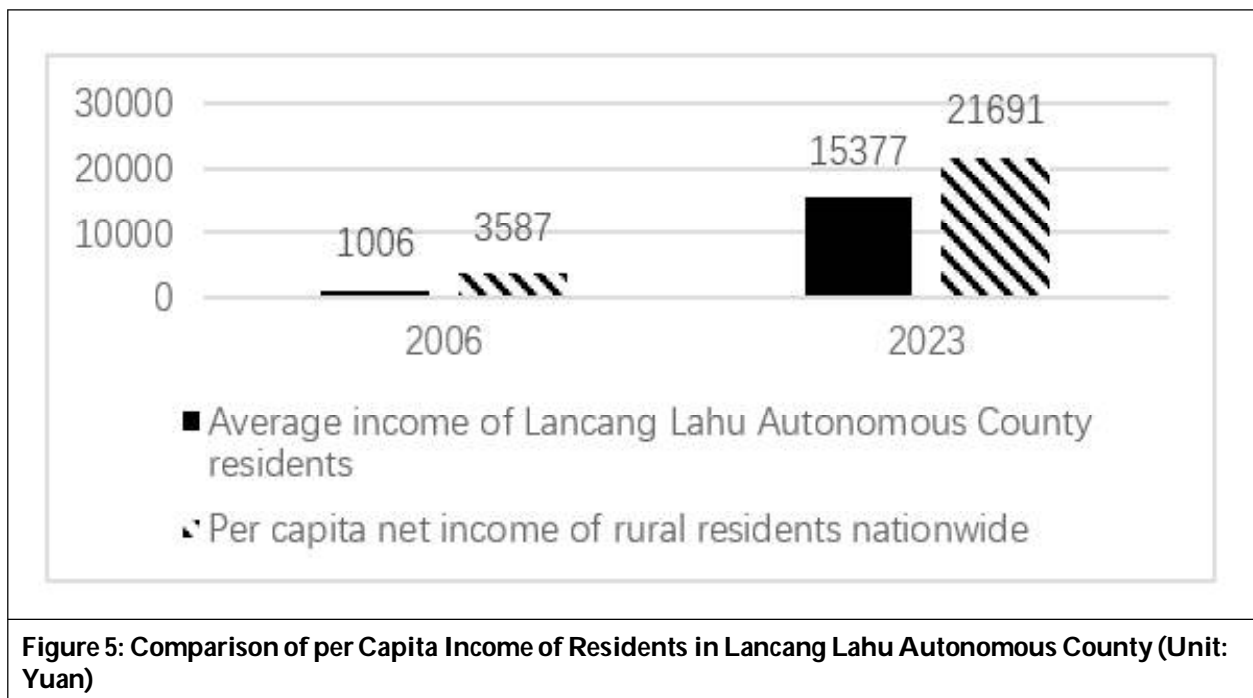
#### **4. Analysis of the Causes of Psychological Problems in Lahu Students**

This study uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods to explore the causes of psychological problems of Lahu adolescent students in Lancang Lahu Autonomous County, Yunnan Province. Through descriptive statistics and inferential statistical analysis, the questionnaire data identified the common mental health problems of Lahu children. Qualitative data are encoded through interviews and field surveys to identify the key factors affecting the mental health of Lahu teenagers and children, focusing on family education and cultural background. In the process of analysis, quantitative and qualitative data complement each other. Qualitative data provides a more detailed background explanation for quantitative analysis, while quantitative data provides a broad verification basis for qualitative findings. The combination of the two ensures the comprehensiveness and profundity of the research results. When analyzing the causes of Lahu children's psychological problems, we should not only consider their common factors as left-behind children in backward rural areas but also explore their uniqueness. This paper comprehensively uses the methods of literature review, questionnaire survey, and interview, combined with the comprehensive analysis obtained from the field survey, hoping to carry out multi-dimensional in-depth mining on the causes of Lahu children's

psychological problems and explore the mental health challenges faced by Lahu children under the influence of multiple factors such as family, culture, social environment and so on.

#### 4.1. Lack of Parental Supervision of Left-Behind Children as a Result of Economic Backwardness Leading to Emigration

The Lancang Lahu Autonomous County, located in the south-west of Yunnan Province, west of the Lancang River, is an ethnic autonomous county with Lahu as its main ethnic group, which has experienced the transition from feudal lordship to socialist society after the founding of New China, and has become an ethnic "straight-through area". One of the basic characteristics of Lancang Lahu Autonomous County is that it has a large population and low income: the total resident population of the county is about 500,000 people, accounting for about one-fifth of the total population of Pu'er City. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, in 2023, per capita disposable income will be RMB 39,218, of which RMB 51,821 will be for urban residents and RMB 21,691 for rural residents (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). In the same year, the disposable income per capita of urban permanent residents in Lancang Lahu Autonomous County was RMB 35,828, while that of rural permanent residents was RMB 15,308 (Lancang Lahu County People's Government Website, 2024) (Figure 5).



**Figure 5: Comparison of per Capita Income of Residents in Lancang Lahu Autonomous County (Unit: Yuan)**

Lancang County is located in the southern section of the Nushan Mountain system of the Hengduan Mountains, which is crisscrossed by five mountains and six waters, with mountain peaks stretching across the country, and more than 150 peaks above 2,000 meters in elevation alone. The mountains and rivers are blocked and the traffic is inconvenient, together with other various reasons, the level of economic development is relatively lagging. Lancang Lahu Autonomous County will not meet the exit standard for poverty-stricken counties until November 2020 and is the last batch of counties and districts to be lifted out of poverty. Economic backwardness has led to the widespread migration of middle-aged and young people from Lahu-populated areas such as Lancang County to work, resulting in a large number of children being left behind.

Most of these left-behind children are under the guardianship of their grandparents, whose guardians are generally older and less educated, and many Lahu elders do not even speak Mandarin, basically unable to give these left-behind children any help in their studies. The lack of ability of the guardians also leads to a certain extent to the left-behind children's low interest in learning, serious anxiety about learning, and failure to form good learning habits and concepts. Coupled with the long-term lack of parental emotional support and supervision, they are prone to psychological problems such as loneliness, fear, and low self-esteem, and display introverted and self-absorbed personality traits. They tend to show high anxiety and low self-esteem in school due to a lack of family support, a lack of confidence in their abilities, and confusion about the future.



This state of affairs makes it difficult for them to concentrate on their studies at school, and mental health problems are more likely to accumulate and deteriorate, eventually manifesting themselves in anorexia and avoidance behaviors, as well as self-harm and suicidal tendencies in serious cases. As Principal L of Secondary School W talks about:

*“A lot of children are left to the elderly with very little parental control. You can’t speak to them in too heavy a tone or too harshly. For example, ‘You’re such a terrible reader, so poorly read, you might as well go and hit the wall and die!’ Then he might just actually hit the wall.”*

*“Light with classmates do not quite get along, and teachers do not communicate with each other and so on these, a little more serious may not want to come to school, produced anorexia, and then when you go to call him back to study, may tell you some light thoughts, but also slit his wrists.”*

At the same time, the development of the Internet and the popularity of short videos have, to a certain extent, brought adverse effects to these children. Left-behind children are more likely to be addicted to fragmented and entertaining short videos due to weaker supervision by their guardians, which leads to less study time, distraction, and lower academic performance. The platforms of many short videos have mixed contents, and some videos may spread bad values, such as showing off wealth, comparing with others, unhealthy lifestyles, or violent elements. Left-behind children are still immature in their physical and mental development and cannot discern rationally, so they are easily influenced by such content, leading to distorted values and the formation of undesirable behavioral habits. Moreover, many of them feel lonely due to the lack of family companionship and want to find emotional support in the virtual world, but such dependence is likely to further exacerbate their sense of social isolation and reduce communication and interaction with their peers or guardians.

In addition, the Lancang Lahu Autonomous County is located on the border, with two borders with Myanmar in the west and southwest, and a national border of 80.563 kilometers. In addition to the problems of closed transport and low levels of economic development, it also faces non-traditional security problems such as drugs and human trafficking. This is coupled with the fact that many Lahu students have long lived in the cultural soil of their ethnic group and were first educated in traditional culture. When they enter the school and face a change in the cultural background of their individual lives, they often experience discomfort, bewilderment, anxiety, and rejection due to the clash of cultures. The multiple pressures of the economic, family, academic, cultural, and social environments may exacerbate the psychological problems of children and adolescents, bringing more complex and serious challenges to school education and the healthy physical and mental growth of students.

#### **4.2 Influence of National Character and Cultural Traditions**

After interviews and questionnaires, we learned that in Lancang, Lahu belongs to a more “sensitive” category among all ethnic groups. When teaching, it is generally necessary to know in advance whether the students are Lahu, if they are Lahu, we have to pay special attention to the way and method, and cannot use too strong words, because of “their ethnic character and temperament here (W Middle School L Principal)”, if a little improper handling, they are likely to cut their wrists, drink pesticides to commit suicide.

And this sensitive and strong character of Lahu may have to start from their origin. The Lahu originated from the ancient Qiang lineage, living in the Hehuang area in the eastern part of Qinghai and the southern part of Gansu. About two thousand years ago, the Qin Dynasty expanded its power to the west, and the ancestors of the Lahu tribe were forced to move to avoid the war. They moved from west to south along the Tongtian River and the Yalong River into the northwestern part of present-day Sichuan, and then crossed the Jinsha River along the southwestern part of the Sichuan River to enter Yunnan Province. The Lahu’s long documentary migration epic “Roots of the ancient (Gengu 根古)” recounts the story of the Lahu ancestors in the Qin and Han Dynasties, who said goodbye to the Tibetan plateau in Qinghai where they flourished, in search of a new place to live, began a migration from north to south, and went through a lot of hardships and trekked through the mountains and waters to enter the Yunnan Province. Some research suggests that the ancient place name “milni toqhod” mentioned in the Lahu Oral Tablet is the Loess Plateau, and that the words “mudni xeul shawfkeul, lawqpa xeul shawAkeul” (meaning the place where the sun and moon bathe) is the Qinghai Lake.

And due to the long-term migration, the Lahu have been in a long period in the hunter-gatherer as the main mode of survival of the nomadic life, is typical hunting people. The Lahu epic of the creation of the world, "Mupa Mipa (牡帕密帕)", records a history of tiger hunting. Legend has it that after the children of Zadi and Nadi (the first pair of siblings in the Lahu folklore, and the originators of mankind in the belief of the Lahu people) grew up, "after a long, long time, thirteen pairs of people, who had raised their children, raised their children, and who filled up nine mountains and nine alcoves... Nine groups of people went to hunt tigers. Nine groups of people went to whisk away the mountains... Nine thousand bamboo tags were the counseling together, and the tiger was finally hunted... Nine groups of people who hunted, came together to distribute... This group of hunters was later to become the Lahu tribe." "Lahu" means "tiger" and "hu" means "the smell of roasted meat". The "tiger-hunting people" is a fancy name for the Lahu. In the early days, Lahu took hunting and gathering as the main production mode, until the Ming and Qing Dynasties settled on the east and west sides of the Lancang River, and then gradually changed to farming as the main production mode and hunting and gathering as the supplementary production mode. However, due to the backwardness of production technology and other reasons, until the founding of the People's Republic of China, fishing, hunting, and gathering still occupied an important part of the Lahu's economic life, and because of the oppression and exploitation by the successive rulers, the Dai Tusi Lords and Han landlords and merchants, as well as the upper echelons of their ethnic groups, the overall socio-economic development of the Lahu was very slow.

This primitive hunting and farming life of relying on the sky for food and praying to the gods for protection has given birth to the worship of all natural things. The Lahu believe that "everything has its spirit", from the sky, earth, mountains, rivers to the sun, moon, stars, stars, from the wind, rain, thunder, electricity to the grass, wood, birds, and animals, everything in the world has a specific spirit attached to it. Among these spirits, the one in command is the god of the sky, "Ursa (厄莎)", who is the creator and master of all things, and all the blessings and misfortunes of human beings depend on the will of "Ursa". In the Mupa Mipa, the image of "Ursa" as the almighty heavenly god is present throughout, and its special economic basis and social structure make it supreme in the minds of the Lahu people.

The formation of the Lahu ethnic group is inextricably linked to its long history of migration and nomadic life. Migration has profoundly affected the culture and psychology of the Lahu, which is not only an important part of the historical narrative and collective memory of the ethnic group but also a key process of shaping the ethnic character. At the same time, it also provides a unique perspective to study the causes of psychological problems among Lahu children and youth. During the Lahu's migration from north to south, they need to constantly adapt to new environments, climates, geographic conditions, and contact with other cultures, a process full of hardships. Overcoming complex terrain, adapting to harsh environments, dealing with external conflicts, and searching for new settlements requires not only physical endurance but also mental toughness and perseverance. The migratory experience makes the Lahu people's character often have the spirit of perseverance, and advocate the character traits of strength and fearlessness, which, from another point of view, also leads to the Lahu people's high self-esteem. Children and young people are also at a stage of immature physical and mental development, with a lower capacity to withstand setbacks and a weaker capacity for psychological adjustment, and are therefore more prone to intense emotional reactions when encountering academic and emotional problems.

Due to the belief in animism centered on the god "Ursa", many Lahu people believe that supernatural forces exist, and when younger children see or hear natural phenomena such as darkness, thunder, and lightning, they easily associate them with evil spirits, retribution, and other inauspicious things, thus increasing their inner tension and fear. At the same time, Lahu people pay great attention to not saying bad words behind people's backs, and there is a proverb that says: "Bad words hurt people's heart, rotten meat smells bad", because they believe that words have their counseling consequences, and language has spiritual power, such as the words of sacrifice, elegy, and such words can only be exported when holding sacrifices and sending souls to the dead. Therefore, they are more sensitive to language, and harsh words or even unintentional words may cause great harm to them. In addition, the Lahu generally believe that the human soul is immortal, forming a unique view of life and death, and treating suicide with a calmer attitude. This cultural tradition is deeply imprinted in the minds of Lahu people, making it easier for Lahu students to choose extreme means when facing psychological pressure.

### 4.3. Changes in the Concept of the Family

The Lahu have a unique national culture and belief system, and the hunter-gatherer-based production mode supplemented by planting and agriculture and the primitive beliefs based on the concept of "all creatures have spirits" have had a profound impact on all aspects of Lahu life. The marriage and family concepts of the Lahu are significantly different from those of the Han Chinese.

The traditional marriage customs of the Lahu are closely linked to their unique mode of production, which has been inherited to this day. Due to the obvious seasonality of hunting and farming activities, the interactions between young men and women are strictly limited to a certain period of time, generally starting after the autumn harvest and ending before the next spring ploughing. It is strictly forbidden to talk about love during the busy farming season, otherwise it will be regarded as a bad custom and forbidden by the world. In modern times, the Lahu people mainly practice monogamy, and it is fashionable to advocate the freedom of love through "marriage without a matchmaker". As mentioned in the Mupa Mipa, the siblings Zadi and Nadi miss each other because of the love potion, and finally Nadi is impregnated, which epitomizes the freedom of pre-marital relationships among the Lahu. Lahu parents generally do not interfere with their children's marriages, because forcibly separating lovers will make "the flower of love bear the bitter fruit of hatred" (Liu, 1988), and if the betrothal is blocked, it is very likely that men and women will go to the mountains to martyr themselves.

The traditional Lahu people attach great importance to marriage and family, and once they are married, they will share the same pains and sufferings and will never leave each other, and very few of them will file for divorce. There is a blessing that says: "Your union is the union of heaven and earth. You should care for each other, have children, and never be separated. Otherwise, heaven and earth will be angry and disaster will come." Filing for divorce is not only opposed by family members and friends, but the people in the walled village also come out to intervene, and those who insist on divorce need to pay a fine. Incest, infidelity, divorce, and children born out of wedlock are all considered shameful and reviled, and serious cases will be raided by the people in the village and stripped of their clothes and trousers to be displayed in the street. Under these strict moral constraints, it is not uncommon for men and women in love to run away from their villages or to kill themselves, resulting in tragedy.

In general, the Lahu older generation places great importance on marriage and family. They emphasize the indissoluble bond of marriage, and hold strict moral control over extramarital love and divorce, the violators of which will face great social pressure and even lead to extreme phenomena such as martyrdom and suicide. However, with the development of society and economy, the closed Lahu area is gradually opening up, and the people's ideological concepts have also undergone great changes. From the point of view of the "Lahu girls" we have contacted, they are not conservative in their thinking, and can even be called "trendy" and "open", and many of them have experienced several marriages at a young age. Many of them have been through several marriages at a young age, and some of them do not even know who the father of their children is, and they do not care about the matter of "leaving the father and raising the children", and they are calm and open when they talk about divorces, remarriages, or children born out of wedlock, and they do not take this as a shame.

The diversification of the form and content of marriage may be a kind of ideological liberation, but this emerging mode of marriage is less stable, and some families are more distant, resulting in children not receiving emotional care and support from their parents. And because Lahu has a tradition of early marriage and early childbearing, many young people are involved in dating activities after the age of 13 or 14 and start having children at the age of 15 or 16. Take the "Lahu girls" that the author has come into contact with as an example, most of them were born in 1995, with an average age of 30 years old, and more than 80% of them have already experienced childbirth and have one or two children, and most of them have reached the age of primary school and junior high school. According to the China Marriage and Family Report 2023 Edition, in 2020, the average age of first marriage will be 29.38 for men and 27.95 for women (Liang, 2024). At a time when urban working women are just planning to enter into marriage, these "Lahu girls" are entering into marriage at a young age, and some of them have experienced separation, marital breakups or even widowhood, which has had a great negative impact on their lives and psychology. How can these young parents take care of their children when they are not mature enough to do so? As Principal L said:

*“Two people prematurely in the mind and body are not mature when the combination, and then cannot afford after the combination of all kinds of family expenses and children out, how to bring up children and other educational issues. Once the conflict accumulates, the big deal is that they don’t want to go through with it and get divorced.”*

*“You don’t have that much time for your counseling relationships, how are you going to have time for children? You are not doing a good job as a parent yourself. Your child sees you like this how will he learn from you?”*

He even expressed surprise at the behavior of some Lahu parents, thinking that they have “no feelings” for their children, for example, after the divorce of both parties, the child was awarded to the mother, who remarried after two years and would not take the child with her, and the father did not care about it, so the child could only be supervised by elderly people in the family, and in this way the child was even transformed from a single-parent child to a left-behind child. Left-behind children. This is also a vicious circle, parents’ counseling relationship view of marriage is immature, arbitrary divorce leads to children become left-behind children, children due to the lack of parental care and discipline, cannot learn the normal mode of getting along with the marriage, in the future will be very likely to arbitrarily choose a partner, repeat the same mistake.

The socialist construction of Mengjia Township was born out of the stage of social development at the end of primitive society, influenced by the economic counseling system of feudal lords and feudal landlords in the neighboring areas. Although the democratic reforms and socialist transformation enabled Mengjia to eliminate the exploitative system and the primitive backwardness of the social system in a short period of time, the productive forces of the society failed to catch up with the advanced areas in a short period of time. In other words, the relations of production crossed several stages of social and historical development, while the productive forces were unable to make a leap of their counseling soon. Compared with the developed areas, the ideology, customs, and productivity level of the older generation in Mengjia Township still continue to be inherited for thousands of years, but the new generation has been impacted by the concepts of the new era, the dissemination of network culture, and so on, and a lot of ideas and views have already been in line with the new trend of the times, but their counseling environment is not enough to support their pursuit of the vision of the heart. The collision of old and new ideas and the conflict between ideals and reality will be reflected in all aspects of life.

Lahu children who are single parents or left-behind children because of marital discord between their parents are a typical example. Most of them are taken care of by their grandparents, and their lack of parental care and unbalanced psychological development often lead to such psychological problems as emotional instability, low self-esteem, lack of self-identity, and difficulties in interacting with others at school. As the basic unit of society, the family specifically reflects the developmental needs and cultural trends of the social era. Based on their counseling life experiences, Lahu parents process and transform their counseling thoughts and needs to form unique values, which are implicitly passed on to the next generation and profoundly affect the psychological development and health of Lahu children.

## **5. Recommendations for Countermeasures**

### **5.1. Improvement of the Economy of the Lancang Ethnic Area and Reduction of Population Outflow**

First, the Government should increase its support for economic construction in the Lancang Lahu ethnic area, increase employment opportunities, and help local families raise their income levels, so as to reduce the problem of children left behind as a result of their livelihoods going out to work. By providing nearby employment opportunities and improving living conditions, parents can live with their children and witness their children’s growth together to reduce mental health problems. Strengthening the pace of infrastructure development in Lahu-populated areas and improving public service conditions such as transport, education, and healthcare, so that Lahu students can grow up in good living conditions, can also reduce the negative impact of poverty on mental health. At the same time, the construction and supporting conditions of school infrastructure should be improved to provide Lahu students with a healthier and more stable growing environment.

## **5.2. Strengthening School Mental Health Education Facilities and Training Mental Health Teachers**

Secondly, it is necessary to increase investment in psychological counseling facilities and improve hardware conditions. The education department can set up special funds to equip schools with standardized psychological counseling rooms mental health assessment tools, and professional psychological counseling equipment to provide students with professional psychological counseling services. At the same time, it has increased the training of mental health teachers in Lancang ethnic areas and improved the treatment and professional attractiveness of mental health teachers. Full-time teachers have been introduced to ensure that they have professional knowledge of psychology and pedagogy and can detect and deal with students' psychological problems in a timely manner. Existing teachers are encouraged to receive training in mental health education, to enhance their understanding of and respect for the cultural background of the Lahu ethnic group, and to form a campus atmosphere in which "everyone cares about mental health", in order to raise the level of mental health education in the overall education team.

## **5.3. Establishment of Synergistic Mechanisms Between Family, School, and Society**

Thirdly, a tripartite mechanism involving schools, families, and society has been established to enhance the social support system for mental health education in the form of parent training and the construction of community psychological service centers. Schools should hold regular parent-teacher conferences and talks on family psycho-education to help parents recognize the importance of family education in students' mental health and master certain psycho-educational skills, so as to enhance the quality of family education. Parents should learn to pay attention to their children's psychological changes in their daily lives and cooperate with schools to intervene in a timely manner when they discover their children's psychological problems, forming a collaborative support network between home and school. The government should encourage local communities and social organizations to establish cooperation mechanisms with schools, such as regularly inviting mental health experts to give talks at schools, or using holiday time to provide psychological counseling to Lahu students, and setting up community mental health support centers to provide professional psychological support to students and families in need, so as to alleviate the pressure on schools. The participation of all sectors of the community will not only provide schools with more resources for psychological education, but also raise Lahu students' awareness of mental health.

## **5.4. Promoting the Popularization of Mental Health Knowledge and Building a Psychological Support System Adapted to National Characteristics**

Finally, because of the special characteristics of Lahu students' cultural traditions and national character, it is all the more important to increase the content of mental health education in school curricula and design mental health programmes incorporating elements of Lahu culture, such as teaching emotional management and psychological adjustment skills through folk stories, songs, and traditional ceremonies, so as to enhance the affinity and effectiveness of education, and to help Lahu students gradually build up a correct concept of mental health. A psychological support system adapted to the characteristics of the Lahu ethnic group should be constructed. Psychological research should be carried out on the cultural background of the Lahu ethnic group, exploring the influence of their traditional beliefs, family structure, personality traits, and other factors on their mental health, and developing psychological intervention methods in line with the characteristics of the ethnic group's culture. Positive psychological resources of the Lahu culture, such as the focus on harmony, optimism, and collective consciousness, can be explored and disseminated, and students can be guided to positively identify with their counseling culture through school curricula, community activities, and cultural festivals. Finally, a regular monitoring and evaluation mechanism should be established to dynamically track the changing trends of psychological problems so that intervention strategies can be adjusted in a timely manner.

## **6. Conclusion**

The results show that Lahu students in Lancang Lahu Autonomous County are facing a series of complex psychological challenges, many of which come from their economic, social, and cultural life and family environment. A large number of left behind children lack parental supervision, the influence of national

character and cultural tradition, and the rapidly changing family structure in the community have led to the increasing prevalence of psychological problems among Lahu teenagers and children. By solving the various causes of Lahu students' mental health problems and implementing intervention measures that adapt to their economic and cultural environment, we can improve the mental health status of Lahu students and promote the healthy growth and development of Lahu students.

This article makes an in-depth analysis of the mental health problems of Lahu teenagers and children in Lancang Lahu Autonomous County and puts forward targeted countermeasures. However, the article also has some limitations. First of all, although the article uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods such as questionnaires and interviews, the sample is limited to specific regions, and the universality of the research conclusions will be limited. Because the Lahu nationality is also distributed in other regions, and the economic, cultural background, and social status are different in different regions, the research results may not fully represent the mental health status of all Lahu adolescents. Secondly, the article mainly analyzes mental health problems from the group level and considers the impact of individual differences (such as gender, age, individual personality, etc.) on mental health. Future research can further analyze the specific impact of different individual backgrounds on mental health, so as to put forward more personalized intervention strategies. At the same time, we can further explore the specific impact of national culture on mental health problems. Through more detailed cultural analysis, we can explore the psychological adaptation process of Lahu children in different cultural conflicts and intergenerational cultural transmission, and reveal how cultural values and emotional expressions shape children's mental health.

Future related research should continue to explore how cultural background, family structure, social support, and other multiple factors affect their mental health, and consider cross-cultural comparison, so as to more comprehensively understand the cultural root causes of psychological problems, so as to design more systematic and targeted intervention measures according to the cultural characteristics of different nationalities, and provide more powerful support for the healthy growth and educational development of children in ethnic areas.

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