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Use of Baidu Index to Track Social Attention to Primary School Students' Mental Health in China

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Abstract: With the rapid development of the internet, search engines have become key information platforms. As China's most popular search engine, Baidu developed Baidu Index, a

crucial statistical analysis tool. This study uses Baidu Index to explore public attention to “primary school students' mental health”, analysing its trends and geographical distribution. Baidu Index provided attention data for the keyword “primary school students' mental health” from January 1, 2024 to April 22, 2026. Public attention was analysed across three dimensions: trend research, demand graph, and crowd portrait. A comparative analysis was also conducted with the related keyword “primary school students' mental health education”. The search volume showed an overall downward trend with periodic fluctuations. The public most attended to “mental health”, “primary school students' mental health education”, and “mental health handwritten newspapers”. Concerned groups were mainly distributed in East China. In terms of demographic attributes, females accounted for 60% of the population in question, and the largest age group was 30-39 years (47%). The related keyword showed a similar search trend but had a consistently higher search index. Baidu Index effectively tracks public attention to primary school students' mental health, reflecting changes linked to educational policies and social events. It can help authorities understand public psychological needs and optimise the allocation of mental health education resources.

Keywords: Primary School Students' Mental Health, Mental Health Education, Search Engine, Baidu Index, Public attention, Social big data.

Introduction

Research Problem

In recent years, with the increasing social emphasis on children's mental health, primary school students' mental health has gradually become a common concern of families, schools, and society. A sound mental state is the basis for individual intellectual development, the shaping of moral character, and the formation of an outlook on life and the world, which directly determines whether primary school students can effectively adapt to environmental changes in cognition, emotion, and behaviour (S. J. He, 2024). With intensified educational competition and accelerated social changes, primary school students are facing growing challenges such as learning pressure, interpersonal communication difficulties, and emotion management problems, making mental health a core ability to cope with these challenges (Wang et al., 2021). As the future backbone of the country and a reserve of talent for social development, primary school students' mental health is crucial to national prosperity and social development (Chen et al., 2023). This research is motivated by the above background.

In response to these growing concerns, a series of national policies have been implemented. In 2023, 17 departments including the Ministry of Education jointly issued the Special Action Plan for Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Students' Mental Health in the New Era (2023-

2025), which clearly stipulated that students' mental health education should be incorporated into the overall work of schools, promoting the normalized development of mental health courses, psychological counseling room construction, and teacher training (Ministry of Education et al., 2023). In October 2025, the Ministry of Education issued the Ten Measures for Further Strengthening the Mental Health of Primary and Secondary School Students, focusing on ten areas, including reducing students' burden, ensuring physical exercise and adequate sleep, and caring for special groups. For instance, it clearly required that primary and secondary school students have at least 2 hours of daily comprehensive physical activity, encouraged the establishment of a weekly "homework-free day," and formulated personalised mental health files for each student (General Office of the Ministry of Education, 2025). In December 2025, 13 departments, including the National Health Commission, issued the Children and Adolescents' Five-Health Promotion Action Plan (2026-2030), which included mental health as one of the five key promotion actions and required schools to carry out at least one mental health lecture or educational activity every academic year (National Health Commission et al., 2026). In February 2026, the Ministry of Education released the Guiding Opinions on Comprehensively Promoting the Construction of Healthy Schools, proposing that healthy schools should cover all schools by 2030, emphasising the integration of physical and mental health, and incorporating mental health into the education system of all-round development of morality, intelligence, physical education, aesthetics, and labour education (Ministry of Education, 2026).

Research Focus

The development of the internet has provided a convenient channel for the public to obtain information and a new approach for researchers to identify public concerns. Relying on its huge user base, Baidu has accumulated massive data on netizens' search behaviours, which truly reflect public interest preferences, shifts in demand, and public opinion orientations, serving as valuable resources for big data analysis (Ma & Chen, 2022). As a data analysis platform based on massive user behaviour data from Baidu, Baidu Index is one of the most important statistical analysis tools in the big data era. It quantifies abstract "attention" into measurable indicators. Baidu Index can scientifically calculate and display media and user attention for keywords over a specific period, and intuitively present the weighted sum and trends in search frequency through graphs, making invisible social psychology visible and measurable (Ma & Chen, 2022).

In the field of education, the application of Baidu Index to analyse public attention to educational policies and teaching methods has gradually become a research hotspot. Baidu Index can monitor online users' search behaviours related to life education and clarify the development trend of Chinese people's attention to life education (Mao, 2022). It has been used to collect data on public attitudes towards the "double reduction" policy, analyse the characteristics of public attention to the policy, and propose strategic suggestions for policy implementation (F. He, 2023). Additionally, researchers have explored the correlation between attention to higher-education stratification and families' out-of-school education investment using Baidu Index search data (Lu et

al., 2026). Based on data from Baidu Index and other platforms, scholars have systematically analysed artificial intelligence attention, sorted out its application scenarios in vocational college teaching in combination with common teaching pain points, and pointed out potential risks of artificial intelligence intervention in teaching, to provide theoretical references and practical paths for promoting educational equity and improving teaching quality (Yang et al., 2025). As a type of big data, online search data has been applied in psychological research in recent years. Current research on epidemic mental health, based on online search data, can be classified into three categories: cross-temporal comparative research, correlational research between epidemics and mental health, and verification research on the effectiveness of online search data (Xu et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2022).

Research Aim and Research Questions

However, systematic research on public attention to the specific topic of “primary school students' mental health” is still insufficient. Therefore, this study adopts the Baidu Index to analyse the search trends and population distribution of “primary school students' mental health” and its related keywords from 2024 to 2026, aiming to reveal the characteristics and changing patterns of public attention to this issue.

Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:

What are the temporal trends of public attention to “primary school students' mental health” from January 2024 to April 2026?

What are the geographic and demographic characteristics of the population concerned with this topic?

How does public attention to “primary school students' mental health” differ from that to “primary school students' mental health education”?

Literature Review

Baidu Index as a Big Data Analytical Tool

Baidu Index, developed by Baidu Inc., is a statistical analysis tool based on Baidu users' search behaviour data. With over 600 million active users, Baidu serves as China's dominant search engine, making its Index a powerful proxy for measuring public attention in the Chinese context. The platform provides multidimensional information, including keyword search trends, demand graphs, and crowd portraits, enabling researchers to quantify public interest and track its evolution over time (Ma & Chen, 2022). Unlike traditional survey-based methods, Baidu Index captures actual behavioural data—what people are actively searching for—rather than what they report in questionnaires, thereby reducing social desirability bias and offering real-time insights into public concerns (Mao, 2022).

The theoretical underpinning of using search data to index social attention lies in the concept of “revealed preference” (Samuelson, 1938). When individuals search for information online, they reveal their genuine interests, needs, and concerns through their queries. Aggregated at scale, these search behaviours form a collective portrait of societal attention. In the health domain, previous studies have validated the use of search engine data for tracking public interest in mental health issues. For example, Google Trends has been widely used to monitor population-level mental health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ayers et al., 2013; Knipe et al., 2020). Similarly, Baidu Index has been employed in the Chinese context to examine public attention to mental health during public health emergencies (Tan et al., 2022). These studies collectively support the validity of using search indices as a reliable proxy for public attention in health-related topics.

Applications of Baidu Index in Educational Research

In recent years, the Baidu Index has been increasingly used in educational research to gauge public attention to various educational policies and practices. Mao (2022) used the Baidu Index to monitor online users' search behaviours related to life education in China, identifying trends in public interest in this area and providing insights for curriculum development. F. He (2023) collected Baidu Index data on the “double reduction” policy, analysed the characteristics of public attention, and offered strategic recommendations for policy implementation. The study found that search peaks often coincided with policy announcements and media coverage, suggesting that Baidu Index can effectively reflect policy-related public engagement.

Furthermore, Lu et al. (2026) explored the relationship between attention to higher education stratification—measured by Baidu Index search volumes—and Chinese families' out-of-school education investment decisions. Their findings suggested that search behaviour data could reveal underlying social stratification concerns and family decision-making patterns. Yang et al. (2025) systematically analysed public attention to artificial intelligence using Baidu Index data, identifying application scenarios and potential risks of AI integration in vocational college teaching. These studies demonstrate the versatility of Baidu Index as a tool for understanding public sentiment towards educational issues.

Online Search Data in Mental Health Research

As a form of big data, online search data has been applied in psychological and mental health research in recent years. Xu et al. (2023) conducted a comprehensive review of mental health studies based on online search data during the COVID-19 pandemic, categorising them into three types: cross-temporal comparative studies, correlation studies between epidemics and mental health outcomes, and validation studies of the effectiveness of online search data. The review concluded that search data can serve as a valuable complement to traditional mental health surveillance methods, particularly in capturing real-time changes in public psychological states.

Tan et al. (2022) specifically used Baidu Index to understand public concern regarding children's mental health in mainland China in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic. Their study demonstrated the feasibility of using Baidu Index to track geographic and demographic variations in mental health attention among children and adolescents. However, the authors noted that search data should be interpreted cautiously, as it reflects information-seeking behaviour rather than actual mental health status. Johnson et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review of mental health literacy for supporting children, emphasising that teachers' and parents'/carers' knowledge and recognition of mental health problems in childhood are critical factors in the help-seeking process. Their findings highlight the importance of understanding not only public attention but also the quality of that attention—whether it translates into appropriate help-seeking behaviour.

Research Gap

Despite the growing body of research on Baidu Index applications in education and mental health, systematic studies focusing specifically on “primary school students' mental health” remain scarce. Most existing studies have examined broader categories such as “children's mental health” or “adolescent mental health,” without distinguishing the unique developmental characteristics and needs of primary school-aged children. Furthermore, few studies have systematically tracked the dynamic changes in public attention to this specific topic over an extended time period or analysed the relationship between policy implementation and search trends. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of social attention to primary school students' mental health using Baidu Index data from January 2024 to April 2026.

Materials and Methods

Developed by Baidu Inc., Baidu Index is a statistical analysis tool based on users' search behaviour data, providing multi-dimensional information such as keyword search trends, demand graphs, and crowd portraits.

Taking “primary school students' mental health” as the research keyword, this study set the time range from January 1, 2024 to April 22, 2026 on the Baidu Index platform to obtain the search trend data for this keyword during this period. The same full-period timeframe was used for geographic distribution analysis at the provincial, regional, and urban levels.

To further explore the public's actual information demands, the top 10 related keywords with the highest search popularity were extracted using the Demand Graph function. This analysis was limited to the most recent one-year period available on the Baidu Index platform (April 21, 2025 to April 19, 2026), as the Demand Graph module only provides data for up to one year.

For demographic analysis (crowd portrait), data on the age and gender distribution of the concerned users were collected from March 2026, the most recent complete month for which

detailed demographic data could be reliably accessed at the time of analysis, given that the free version of Baidu Index provides demographic data every month.

Finally, a comparative analysis of search trends and heat was conducted for the keywords "primary school students' mental health" and "primary school students' mental health education" over the full study period from January 1, 2024 to April 22, 2026.

Results

From January 1, 2024 to April 22, 2026, Baidu search volume for "primary school students' mental health" showed an overall downward trend with periodic fluctuations (Figure 1). The search trends on the PC and mobile terminals were generally consistent with the overall trend. In contrast, the mobile terminal's search frequency was generally higher than that of the PC terminal, indicating that the public preferred to obtain relevant information via mobile phones. In addition, the trend of the Baidu Consultation Index was similar to that of the Search Index (Figure 2), indicating that the public had active search demand for relevant information.

According to the demand graph analysis, among the top 10 related keywords with the highest search heat from April 21, 2025 to April 19, 2026 (Table 1), "mental health" ranked first (frequency=14), followed by "primary school students' mental health education" (frequency=10) and "mental health handwritten newspapers" (frequency=6). Moreover, keywords including "primary school students' safety education", "adolescent mental health" and "definition of mental health" also ranked high. It demonstrated that while paying attention to primary school students' mental health, the public also showed strong interest in basic mental health concepts, educational methods and interactive forms such as handwritten newspapers.

In terms of crowd portrait analysis, provinces that paid close attention to primary school students' mental health were mainly Henan, Jiangsu and Beijing. At the regional level, East China had the highest attention, followed by North China and Central China. At the urban level, Beijing, Chongqing and Shanghai had significantly higher attention than other cities (Figure 3). In terms of population attributes, the age distribution showed that people aged 30 to 39 were the main group of concern, followed by those aged 40 to 49. In terms of gender distribution, the proportion of female attention was significantly higher than that of males (Figure 4), indicating that females paid more attention to primary school students' mental health issues.

The comparative analysis of search trends for "primary school students' mental health" and "primary school students' mental health education" showed that the two keywords exhibited similar trends. At the same time, the latter had a significantly higher overall search index (Figure 5). This is because "primary school students' mental health education" specifically refers to educational methods for improving and maintaining primary school students' mental health (Zhao & Shi, 2018).

Therefore, the public tended to search for actionable solutions rather than merely understanding mental health status or problems.

Figure 1

Overall search volume trend of "primary school students' mental health" from January 1, 2024 to April 22, 2026. (A) Overall search trend and average value. (B) PC terminal search trend and average value. (C) Mobile terminal search trend and average value.



Figure 2

Baidu Consultation Index and its average value of "primary school students' mental health" from January 1, 2024 to April 22, 2026

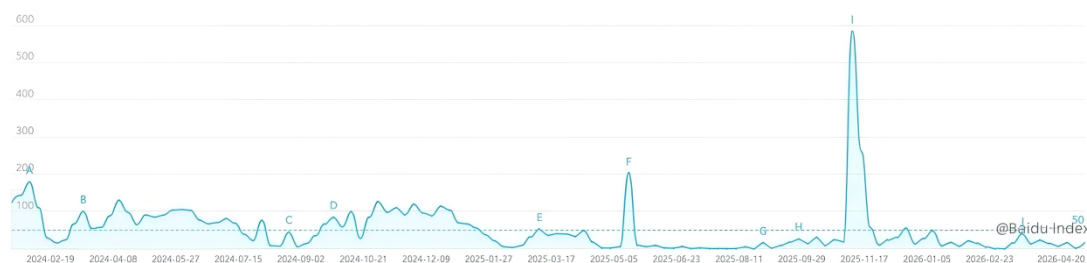


Table 1

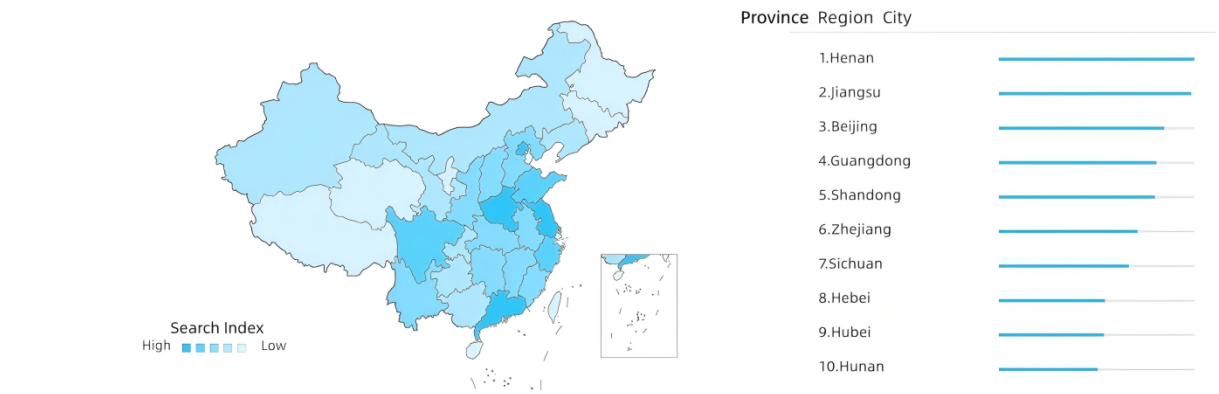
Top 10 Keywords with the Highest Search Heat from April 21, 2025 to April 19, 2026

Ranking	Keyword	Frequency
1	Mental Health	14
2	Primary School Students' Mental Health Education	10
3	Mental Health Handwritten Newspapers	6
4	Primary School Students' Safety Education	6
5	Primary School Students	5
6	Contents of Mental Health Handwritten Newspapers	3
7	Adolescent Mental Health	3
8	Definition of Mental Health	3
9	Mental Health Education	2
10	Mental Health Themed Class Meetings	2

Note. Frequency indicates the number of times each keyword appeared among the top 10 related search terms during the specified period.

Figure 3

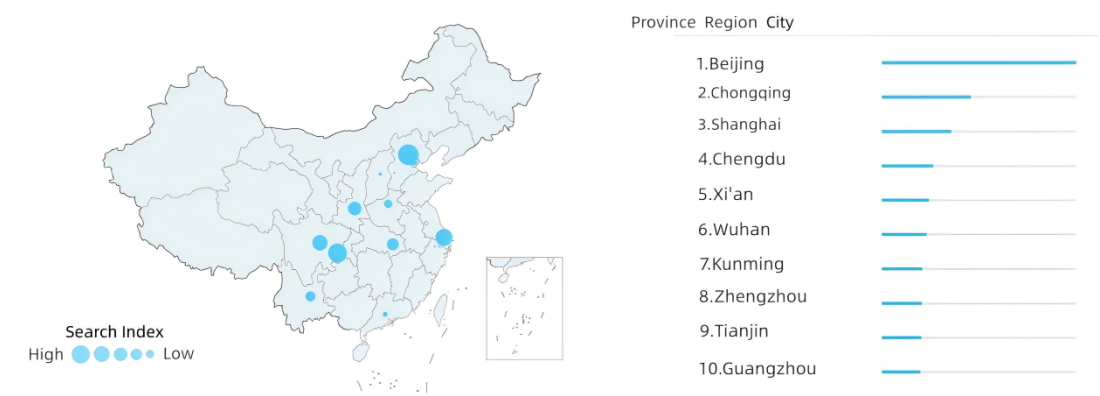
Crowd Portrait of "Primary School Students' Mental Health" at Provincial (A), Regional (B) and Urban (C) Levels from January 1, 2024 to April 22, 2026



(A) Provincial Distribution



(B) Regional Distribution



(C) Urban Distribution

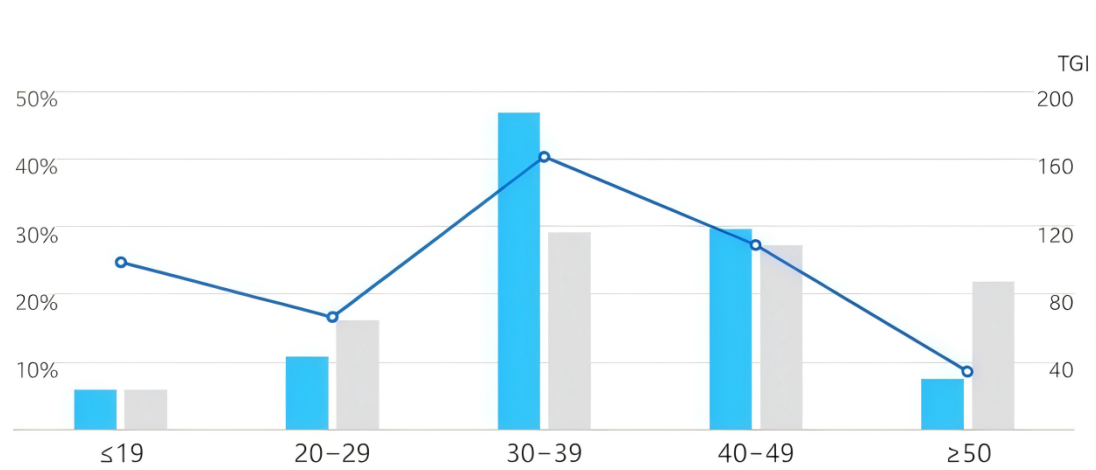
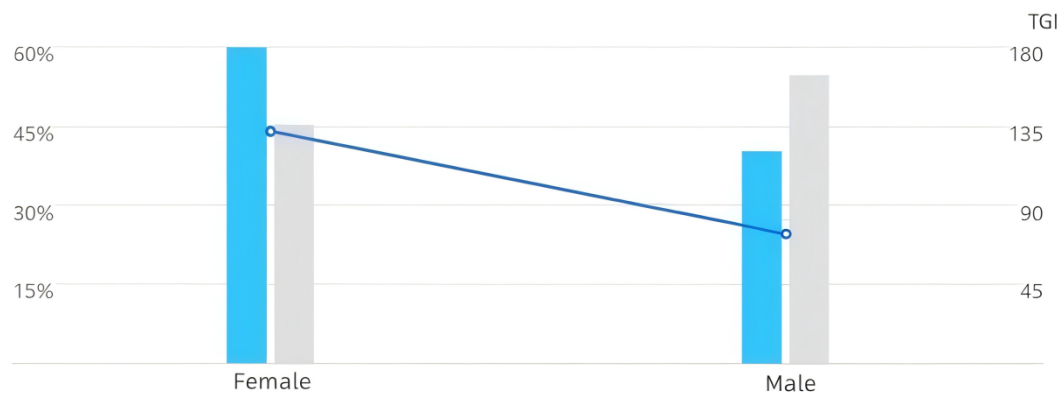


Figure 4

Population Attribute Chart Classified by Age (A) and Gender (B)

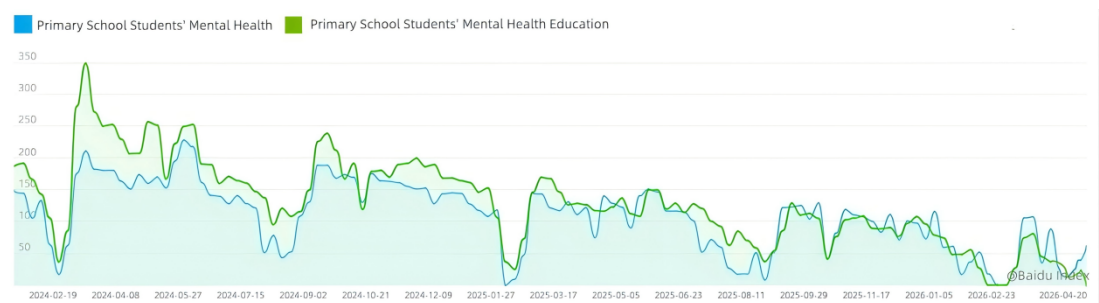
(A) Age Distribution



(B) Gender Distribution

Figure 5

Trend of Baidu Index: Primary School Students' Mental Health Education (Related to Mental Health of Primary School Students). Search trend from January 1, 2024 to April 22, 2026(A). Comparison of daily average search volume between the research keyword and the related keyword(B).



A

Keyword	Overall Daily Average	Mobile Daily Average
Primary School Students' Mental Health	108	60
Primary School Students' Mental Health Education	129	86

B

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

Based on Baidu Index, this study analyzed the social attention changes of the topic "primary school students' mental health" from January 1, 2024 to April 22, 2026. The results showed that the search heat of this topic presented an overall downward trend with periodic fluctuations. The overall downward trend was closely related to the implementation and promotion of a series of mental health education policies. In 2023, 17 departments including the Ministry of Education jointly issued the Special Action Plan for Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Students' Mental Health in the New Era (2023-2025), which required the normalization of mental health education in schools(Ministry of Education et al., 2023). With the gradual implementation of policies, mental health education has evolved from a hot topic to routine work. In recent years, mental health education has become an important part of school education, and public awareness of primary school students' mental health has been improved, reducing overreaction to emergencies(L. Wang, 2024). As the mental health service system continues to improve, parents and teachers can handle students' psychological problems more calmly and reduce their dependence on real-time

information(Dai & Fu, 2025). The above reasons collectively explain the overall downward search trend observed in this study.

The search heat of "primary school students' mental health" showed periodic fluctuations. As shown in Figure 1, search peaks usually appeared within one month after the start of each semester (early March and mid-September), around final examinations (late June and early January), with a slight increase in search volume every May, while the search volume was generally low during winter and summer vacations. There are three main reasons for the periodic fluctuations. Firstly, the start of a new semester brings new learning tasks and goals for students, raising parents' and teachers' attention to students' mental health. Especially in the early stage of the semester, students may suffer from anxiety and emotional fluctuations due to environmental and curriculum adaptation(Zhao & Xing, 2014), prompting the public to search for relevant information actively. In addition, schools usually carry out mental health education activities at the beginning of semesters, which increases public attention to primary school students' mental health(Li et al., 2025). Secondly, students face the greatest psychological pressure before and after examinations, making parents and teachers more sensitive to students' mental health and increasing search behaviors. Poor examination results may cause anxiety or depression among students(Chen et al., 2018), motivating the public to search for solutions. Thirdly, social publicity and policy promotion contribute to the fluctuations. Every May, primary and secondary schools across the country carry out themed activities for Mental Health Day to promote the integrated development of mental health education(Ma et al., 2024), resulting in a significant increase in public attention during this period.

Geographic and Demographic Disparities

Geographically, Henan, Jiangsu and Beijing had the highest search indexes at the provincial level. Henan Province has 26 million children, including 5.7 million left-behind children in rural areas(Department of Civil Affairs et al., 2020). Alienated parent-child relationships and extensive intergenerational education weaken the positive guidance of school education, leaving most left-behind children in a sub-health psychological state(S. K. Liu, 2011). A 2024 quantitative study on rural left-behind children in Kaifeng, Henan Province using the Mental Health Test (MHT) confirmed that left-behind children had psychological problems in multiple dimensions, with significant differences in gender and left-behind years(F. F. Liu, 2024; Lin et al., 2024; Long et al., 2025).This explains why Henan Province ranks high in the search index of primary school students' mental health.

East China had significantly higher attention to primary school students' mental health than other regions, which is attributed to its high economic development level, abundant educational resources and parents' strong educational awareness. Firstly, East China has a developed economy and high internet penetration rate, with residents being more active in information acquisition. Studies have shown that economic development level is positively correlated with online health

information search behaviors(Teng, 2015). Secondly, the region has abundant educational resources, and parents generally have a higher education level and a deeper understanding of mental health(Zheng et al., 2025). In addition, local governments in East China such as Shanghai, Jiangsu and Zhejiang have issued local policies to promote students' mental health, such as the medical-education collaborative system for primary and secondary school students' mental health services in Shanghai(T. T. Wang, 2023), which further boosts public search behaviors. In contrast, the low search heat in central and western China indicates unbalanced distribution of mental health education resources and policy publicity.

As shown in Figure 4, the demographic analysis revealed that females accounted for 60% of the concerned population while males accounted for 40%, reflecting higher female attention. In terms of age distribution, people aged 30 to 39 accounted for the largest proportion (47%), mainly primary school students' parents. People aged 40 to 49 ranked second (29.8%), including school leaders, teachers and other social groups. People over 50 years old accounted for only 8%, and teenagers under 19 years old had the lowest proportion (6%). The Target Group Index (TGI) can reflect the attention difference of different user groups. A TGI value of 100 represents the average level, and a value higher than 100 means higher attention than the overall level. In this study, the TGI of females was higher than that of males, proving that females were more interested in primary school students' mental health information. Influenced by the traditional gender division of labor of "men breadwinners, women homemakers", Chinese families have long formed a gender-based family labor division. Females are mainly responsible for family internal affairs such as child care, and this division will continue in modern families(X. Li, 2016; T. T. Li, 2021; Wu & He, 2024), which accounts for the higher female TGI index.

Implications for Policy and Practice

In terms of related keyword analysis, "primary school students' mental health education" had a similar search trend to "primary school students' mental health" with higher search heat, indicating that the public preferred specific and actionable keywords. Users' search intention can be reflected more accurately by specific search terms, and their search queries become more focused when they have specific tasks (Zhang et al., 2014). If schools and communities adopt public-friendly expressions such as "mental health handwritten newspapers" and "mental health themed class meetings" in publicity, they can better guide people in need to obtain professional help. The research also indicates a certain gap between policy texts and daily public language. Translating professional policy language into easy-to-understand daily expressions for ordinary families is a worthy communication research topic.

Limitations

Admittedly, this study has certain limitations. First, Baidu Index only reflects search behaviors, which cannot be completely equivalent to actual public attention or demands. Search behavior may

be influenced by factors such as internet accessibility, digital literacy, and media exposure, potentially introducing biases in the data. Second, some search behaviors may be interfered with by short-term factors such as media reports and social events rather than reflecting long-term attention trends. The correlation between search peaks and specific events discussed in this study remains descriptive rather than causal, as we did not conduct statistical significance testing for policy-event linkages. Third, the demographic analysis was based on data from a single month (March 2026), which may not fully capture seasonal variations in the demographic composition of searchers. Fourth, the Table 1 “frequency” metric indicates the number of times each keyword appeared among the top 10 related search terms during the specified period; however, it does not represent absolute search volumes, and the interpretation of this metric should be made with caution.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research can address these limitations in several ways. First, researchers may combine school psychological counseling data and parental questionnaires with online search data to further verify the correlation between search data and actual public demands, as well as to highlight the importance of parental mental health literacy in the help-seeking process (Johnson et al., 2023). Second, longitudinal studies that track both search behavior and actual mental health service utilization across multiple regions could establish more robust evidence for the predictive validity of Baidu Index data. Third, future studies could incorporate time-series analysis or regression models to statistically test the causal or correlational relationships between policy implementation and search volume changes, moving beyond descriptive interpretations. Fourth, comparative studies between Baidu Index and other data sources (e.g., Google Trends, WeChat Index, or Douyin/TikTok search data) could provide a more comprehensive understanding of public attention across different digital platforms in China.

Conclusion

Baidu Index is an effective tool for exploring public attention to primary school students' mental health. The research results show that the search volume of primary school students' mental health presents an overall downward trend with periodic fluctuations, which is closely related to the implementation of mental health policies. Females show higher attention to primary school students' mental health than males. Henan Province ranks first nationwide in provincial search volume due to its large child population, and Beijing ranks first in urban search volume as one of the first pilot cities for mental health education. The related keyword "primary school students' mental health education" has a consistent search trend with the research keyword and a higher daily average search volume.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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