

## Chronic pain onset age getting younger

China Daily · 20 Feb 2023 · 6 · Yang Zekun

Many young people experience pain in their shoulders, neck and lower back after long bouts of study or work. Some even joke that these conditions should be regarded as occupational injuries.

The fact that more young people are seeking help via massage therapy reflects changes in society.

In addition to changes in lifestyles resulting from the use of electronic devices in every part of our lives, greater stress, anxiety and competition at work are also among the main culprits. According to the Guidelines for Diagnosis, Treatment and Rehabilitation of Cervical Spondyl-osis 2019, published by the Chinese Association of Rehabilitation Medicine, the onset age for the condition is becoming younger, with about 25 percent of patients age 20 to 29.

The mobile internet is growing fast in China. Short-video platforms — such as Douyin and Kuaishou — are competing for users' time, and they have attracted a large number of young people who rely on cellphones too much, which increases the risk of chronic pain.

In addition, these fast-paced lifestyles and social media displays of their peers' success can exacerbate the anxiety that many young people already feel, which can prompt them to work hard but leave little or no time for relaxation.

Among the social phenomena behind the growing pressure of social competition is the rise in average working hours. For many young people, working overtime is something they take for granted.

Many young people may deliberately keep themselves busy to combat their anxiety. This has seen the emergence of a large number of “phubbers” — aka “phone snubbers” — people who always keep their heads down and stare at mobile phone screens. Their day consists of looking at the computer at work and staring at their phone during leisure hours.

When I went to the massage hospital for treatment, I spoke with some young patients. I discovered that in addition to pain relief, they wanted to give themselves a couple of hours that were completely unrelated to work.

One patient said the 30 minutes he spends on the treatment table are the most restful moments he has every week because he doesn't have to answer endless messages or phone calls. Once the treatment finishes, the patients have to return to their regular lives and compete to move forward in their careers.

Some doctors say young people should have healthy living habits and correct their mental state to prevent illness, but many factors are external rather than mental, such as servicing car loans, mortgages, children's education fees, and the pressure to win promotion.

In many cases, although they do not want to, they have to sacrifice their health to earn opportunities.