

Analysis of Burnout Among National Civil Servants and Countermeasures of Positive Psychological Intervention

D District State Tax Bureau of T City, J Province as an Example

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ABSTRACT

Burnout is a widespread phenomenon among grassroots civil servants, which exerts a profound influence not only on their work efficiency but also on their public image. This study takes the D District State Tax Bureau of T City, J Province as an example to describe the current situation of burnout among civil servants in the grassroots state taxation department, analyse the contributing factors affecting the professional burnout, and propose intervention measures from a positive psychology perspective.

Keywords: *Civil servants, Job burnout, Positive psychology*

1. INTRODUCTION

The research on burnout is an emerging field pioneered by clinical psychologist Freudenberger H. J. in 1974, which has attracted the attention of numerous management and psychological scientists worldwide over the last fifty years. For those working in service industries, burnout can be identified as emotional exhaustion, dehumanization, and a reduced sense of personal fulfilment [1].

Concerning another keyword, grassroots civil servants, it refers to individuals recruited in the front and back offices, respectively, at the county, section, and township level. The characteristics of grassroots civil servants are mainly reflected in the following aspects. Firstly, they are responsible for dealing with diverse tasks and the corresponding group emergencies in a complex environment. Secondly, they are insufficient in supportive working conditions, abundant working resources, and substantial welfare benefits. Thirdly, the management system for grassroots civil servants is primarily an authoritarian form of human rule with untransparent and unscientific management as well as an imperfect promotion system [2].

At present, the burnout of grassroots civil servants is strongly associated with a series of negative physical,

cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions such as depletion of emotional resources, complaints and avoidance of the work environment, indifference to service, lack of professional pride, and separation from service[3]. According to the burnout survey conducted by the Civil Service Mental Health Network, 40% of civil servants in Longwan District in Wenzhou significantly suffered from burnout. Also, a study on the current psychological state of civil servants in Chongqing revealed that more than half of them are exhausted and burned out from their occupational undertakings [4]. Therefore, it is obvious that burnout is currently common among civil servants in China, and the level of burnout is also very high.

The current burnout research in China has primarily adhered to the perspective of the traditional negative psychology to investigate the association between burnout and work stress, role conflicts, and psychiatric symptoms, emphasizing the negative effect of passive alleviation of burnout. However, "we cannot seek human happiness by fixing problems" [5]. Positive psychology is a novel approach to the conventional psychological study, which shifts its focus to the positive aspects of human nature, society, and life. According to Seligman, positive psychology is the scientific study of positive subjective experiences,

positive personality traits, the positive social environment, and positive organizational systems that facilitate their development [6].

This paper takes civil servants as the research object who were chosen from the grassroots national tax system of D District State Tax Bureau in T City, J Province. A variety of studies have been conducted on the current burnout phenomenon and the influencing factors so as to provide intervention countermeasures for reversing the burnout situation of civil servants in the grassroots tax system from the perspective of positive psychology.

2. SUBJECTS AND METHODS

2.1. Survey Subjects

A random anonymous questionnaire was conducted in D District, T City, J Province. 250 questionnaires were distributed, and 223 valid ones were returned, with an effective rate of 89.2%. Nine employees of diverse genders, ages, educational levels, and positions were selected to gather direct and indirect information relevant to the study.

2.2. Investigation Methods

2.2.1. Interviews

Individual interviews, face-to-face interviews, and one-off interviews were employed in this study. These unstructured interviews lasted around five minutes.

2.2.2. Questionnaires

The questionnaire consists of the basic demographic information, a burnout scale, a job satisfaction scale, and a social support scale. The Burnout Scale has 15 questions based on the MBI-GS Burnout Scale, which was revised by Chao-Ping Lee [7]. The scale is divided into three dimensions, including emotional exhaustion, de-humanise, and reduced personal accomplishment. Job satisfaction was measured using the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ), a 20-question short-form questionnaire developed by Weiss (1986). The MSQ contains three dimensions such as intrinsic satisfaction, extrinsic satisfaction, and general satisfaction. The Social Support Scale developed by Xiao Shuiyuan in 1986 was also introduced, which has 10 questions distributed in three dimensions, including objective support, subjective support, and use of social support.

2.2.3. Statistical methods

SPSS17.0 was used for data analysis and statistical discussion.

3. SURVEY RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

3.1. Analysis of burnout in grassroots national tax civil servants

Table 1. Burnout descriptive statistics

Job Burnout	N	Average	Standard deviation
Emotional exhaustion	223	3.2556	0.90193
De-humanise	223	3.3935	1.00904
Reduced personal accomplishment	223	3.0553	0.98471

The mean value of the burnout scale for civil servants in the D District State Taxation Department is 3.22, indicating a medium to high level. The highest figure was identified in dehumanization score (3.3935), followed by emotional exhaustion (3.2556), while the lowest one was located in reduced personal fulfilment (3.0553).

Table 2. T-test for independent samples by gender

Job Burnout	F	P	t	df	p	Mean Difference
Emotional exhaustion	.023*	0.879	2.877	221	0.004	0.3479
De-humanise	0.41	0.523	0.869	221	0.386	0.11959
Reduced personal accomplishment	3.21	0.075	-2.025	221	0.044	-0.2698

With regards to the emotional exhaustion, males scored substantially higher than females ($t = 2.877p < 0.05$). This may be due to the fact that this career demands a high level of emotional engagement and fine-tuned work skills, which is what men intrinsically lacks; therefore, they are inclined to feel emotionally depleted.

Table 3. Multiple comparison test results for age groups on burnout by the level of ANOVA

Job Burnout	Age (I)	Age (J)	Mean difference (I-J)	p
Emotional exhaustion	26-35	25 and below	.27964*	0.049
	46-55	26-35	.40762*	0.022
	46-55	36-45	.37962*	0.003
Reduced personal accomplishment	36-45	26-35	.22876*	0.03
	46-55	36-45	.62152*	0.006
	56 and above	46-55	.79527**	0.001

Concerning the dimensions of the emotional exhaustion and dehumanisation, significant differences can be discovered between civil servants of different ages ($F = 3.879p < 0.05$; $F = 5.684p < 0.05$). The 46-55-year-old suffered more from emotional exhaustion than those of 26-35 and 36-45 years old. Dehumanisation was more prevalent among the 46-55 age group than 36-45 and even more prevalent among the 56+ age group than the 46-55 age group. This is mainly because the work content of the grassroots state tax system is relatively so repetitive that it is unavoidable that people may find it monotonous and tedious to be engaged in this kind of work for a long time. At the same time, the grassroots staff are required to work under the supervision of the public, so they are confronted with excessive emotional pressure, which may be constantly considered the chief culprit of the high burnout levels. This is also confirmed by the fact that the burnout level of grassroots staff in the tax department with 11-15 years of working experience is higher than that of public servants with other years of service.

3.2. Analysis of the correlation between job satisfaction and burnout among grassroots public servants

Table 4. The correlation between job satisfaction and burnout

Job Burnout		Internal satisfaction	External satisfaction	Overall satisfaction
Emotional exhaustion	Pearson Relevance	-.243**	-.185**	-.230**
	p	0	0.006	0.001

De-humanise	Pearson Relevance	-0.513	-1.94	-0.437
	p	0	0.003	0
Reduced personal accomplishment	Pearson Relevance	-0.065	-0.014	-0.044
	p	0.335	0.836	0.509

(* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$)

Table 4 reveals that the job satisfaction among grassroots IRS civil servants have significantly negative correlations with their emotional exhaustion, dehumanisation, and reduced personal fulfilment. This indicates that the increased job satisfaction of grassroots staff requires the stakeholders to reduce their feelings of burnout.

3.3. Analysis of the correlation between social support and burnout

Table 5. The correlation between social support and burnout

Job Burnout		Objective support	Subjective support	Support Utilization
Emotional exhaustion	Pearson Relevance	-.138*	-.162*	-0.155
	p	0.04	0.015	0.018
De-humanise	Pearson Relevance	-0.159	-0.246	-0.179
	p	0.017	0	0.006
Reduced personal accomplishment	Pearson Relevance	-0.016	-0.057	-0.037
	p	0.779	0.4	0.587

(* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$)

Table 5 indicates that social support among grassroots IRS civil servants also strongly and negatively correlates with emotional exhaustion and dehumanisation of burnout. In other words, the higher levels of social support civil servants have, the lower levels of burnout they will feel.

4. POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSES AND SUGGESTIONS TO ALLEVIATE BURNOUT

4.1. Enhancing positive satisfaction experiences for grassroots civil servants

Instead of the minority of people with psychological or mental illnesses, positive psychology is directed at the average healthy person. This not only allows psychologists to take on an open-minded attitude toward human potential, motivation, and ability but also encourages them to draw a conclusion beneficial to ordinary people. From the perspective of positive psychology, it aims to delve into "the psychological power that people can actively control". On a subjective level, the power refers to an individual's positive subjective experience, which enables them to release the psychological tensions caused by negative emotions, thereby allowing people to maintain the human organism healthy and energetic, or even to create an innovative behavioural pattern or a novel thinking [8]. This study also confirms that satisfaction has a significantly negative correlation with burnout, so the high level of people's subjective satisfaction plays an indispensable part in lowering their burnout.

To achieve the aforementioned purposes, it is essentially necessary to possess an objective self-understanding, a relatively fair assessment of oneself, a thorough awareness of one's own strengths and positive characteristics, an acceptance of oneself and one's working environment, and a positive attitude towards the uncontrollable elements of work. The next step is to "cherish the present". The grassroots civil servants should look squarely at their work and recognize that they not only represent the public image of the state but also exercise power endowed by the people. These positive feelings of job honour exert a favourable effect on enhancing job satisfaction and a sense of achievement when civil servants are surrounded by diverse difficulties and pressures at work. Finally, it is a virtuous cycle to set effective goals for oneself to find meaning in one's work. Goals and plans can be recognized as the magic keys to unlocking the door to happiness and success, which prevents people from easily becoming apprehensive and burned out within the framework of natural law [9].

4.2. Suggestions for positive interventions in terms of work organization and social support

Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, everyone has physiological, security, belonging and love, as well as respect and self-actualization needs [10]. In this case, it is critical to establish a positive and supportive working environment for grassroots civil servants so that they can be more confident in the workplace. Also, effective

human resource management will improve the quality of work, thus encouraging staff to overcome burnout.

According to the research on positive psychology, people are often endowed with numerous positive traits such as strong learning desire, learning motivation, and a clear sense of self. Although the genetic correlation coefficient for exhibiting these traits is around 0.5, it is crucial to take into consideration the effective function of environmental influences and positive self-training in nurturing these characteristics [11]. It is inevitable that grassroots state tax departments should provide training in order to improve the working capacity of public servants and provide intellectual support for their personal development. This is primarily because training can be considered a significant tool to improve the efficiency of adult staff and help them achieve promotion. Therefore, strengthening the training of grassroots public servants can effectively prevent them from burnout caused by their profession and interests.

Additionally, in order to alleviate the level of burnout, the management layers should improve the incentive mechanism, which can enhance both the external satisfaction, such as high salary and promotion schemes, of the grassroots state tax staff and subsequently their internal satisfaction, such as personal value embodiment. First of all, the most effective measure in the incentive mechanism is to formulate a reasonable and well-organized remuneration and welfare system and to improve the salary level of the grassroots staff in the national taxation department. Secondly it is very necessary to formulate an acceptable promotion system, without which those civil servants may give up pursuing their personal values. Thirdly, an objective performance appraisal system should be formulated. This achievement assessment system enables the staff to be impartially evaluated according to their different positions and job-targeted responsibility.

Considering the fact that the grassroots state taxation department is a national economic law enforcement agency with significant economic power, the public servants in these departments are often subject to the supervision and scrutiny from the general public, the media, and the public prosecution and legal authorities. However, their pressures of work and life are frequently overlooked by society, and the slightest omission or problem will be infinitely magnified, which undoubtedly poses several challenges and barriers to the grassroots state taxation departments. The interviews revealed that these grassroots government officials mostly received social support from their families, with relatively little aid from other organizations. Therefore, the general public is required to be aware that even civil servants are ordinary people with normal physical and psychological development requirements. Rather than viewing them with harshness, the public should create an atmosphere of understanding, respect, and tolerance,

thereby working together to promote the harmonious development of society.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, burnout is a significant phenomenon among grassroots tax civil servants. Positive psychological interventions for them are very useful to reduce burnout experience and increase job satisfaction. It also improves the efficiency and enthusiasm of civil servants in their jobs so that they can perform better in their position and promote state economic and social development.

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