



Exploring the Influencing Factors of Job Burnout among Young Female Teachers in Higher Education: A Grounded Theory Study

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Abstract. Young female educators in higher education have become an essential component of the academic workforce. An in-depth investigation into the factors influencing their occupational burnout can significantly enhance faculty development, improve scientific research capabilities, and foster talent cultivation. Accordingly, this study employs grounded theory to analyze interview data from six young female educators at dual first-class universities in Beijing. The findings indicate that high achievement orientation, pressures from work expansion, and societal expectations related to gender roles are the primary factors contributing to their occupational burnout.

Keywords: Young female teacher; Higher education; Burnout; Ground Theory

1 Introduction

In recent years, with the increase in the number of young female teachers, they have become a backbone in scientific research and education in Chinese universities. However, under the circumstances of an increasingly competitive research environment, coupled with the influence of social environmental factors and family responsibilities, their occupational burnout is more pronounced compared to male teachers. Therefore, gaining a deep understanding of the factors influencing occupational burnout among young female university teachers is of great significance for strengthening the construction of the university faculty team and enhancing the teaching and research capacity of higher education institutions. Currently, the academic community mostly investigates the factors affecting occupational burnout within the general university teacher group, with less research focusing on young female university teachers. To address this gap, this paper employs qualitative research methods, targeting female teachers from Beijing's "Double First-Class" universities, to deeply explore the factors influencing occupational burnout among young female university teachers.

2 Literature Review

Occupational burnout is defined as a state of mental fatigue and emotional depression at work caused by job stress [1]. Maslach categorizes it into three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment [2]. Teacher burnout refers to the negative response that arises when teachers' adaptive mechanisms become imbalanced under external pressure [3]. Currently, academic circles classify the factors influencing occupational burnout among university teachers into three categories: organizational factors, personal factors, and social environmental factors [4]. In terms of organizational factors, Liu Kai (2013) pointed out that the high degree of administrative control within university organizations can lead to occupational burnout [5]. Ren Meina et al. (2021) noted that the conflict between administrative logic and academic logic is the essential reason for teacher occupational burnout [6]. Huo Dongjiao (2024) indicated that the "up-or-out" system, combined with the intersection of research, teaching, and administrative tasks, deprives teachers of the sovereignty over their personal lives. Both factors collectively deconstruct teachers' professional identity, ultimately causing them to fall into occupational emptiness and confusion [7]; In the realm of social environmental factors, Muijs et al. (2004) demonstrated that the social status of schools affects the ability of higher education faculty to access resources, which in turn influences their levels of occupational burnout [8]. Furthermore, Liu (2017) [9] and Li (2017) [10] Role conflict has been identified as an important cause of occupational burnout [11]. A substantial body of empirical research indicates that individual characteristics can significantly influence the onset of occupational burnout [12]. Studies conducted by Mazur and Lynch (1989) and Maslach (1993) have demonstrated that self-esteem serves as a notable predictor of occupational burnout [13]. Moreover, recent findings by Gao Xin et al. (2023) reveal that teachers experience varying levels of stress at different stages of their careers [14].

In summary, it is evident that women and men demonstrate different characteristics regarding occupational burnout, with women more susceptible to experiencing it. However, the current academic research lacks studies focusing on the factors influencing occupational burnout among female teachers. Therefore, this paper selects young female university teachers as the research subjects and employs qualitative research methods to explore the influencing factors of occupational burnout within this group.

3 Research Methods and Design

3.1 Grounded Theory Study

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method that requires researchers not to formulate any hypotheses at the beginning of the study. Its core is to establish theory from the top down, identifying core concepts that reflect phenomena and constructing relevant social theories by exploring the relationships between ideas [14].

3.2 Sample Introduction

The study sample consists of young female teachers under the age of 39 from "Double First-Class" universities in Beijing, totaling six individuals. Among them, three are from arts and humanities disciplines and three are from science and engineering disciplines. Additionally, two participants each are married with children, married without children, and unmarried without children. This balanced distribution in terms of professional composition and marital and fertility status can essentially reflect the occupational burnout status of female teachers at "Double First-Class" universities in Beijing.

3.3 Research Process

First, interviews were conducted with six young female teachers, focusing primarily on the question: "What factors contribute to your occupational burnout?" Subsequently, NVivo 14 software was employed to analyze and organize the raw data. Finally, a theoretical saturation test was conducted, during which team members conducted a three-level coding process. After completing the coding, no new factors emerged, thus it can be considered that this study achieved theoretical saturation [15].

4 Grounded Analysis Process

4.1 Open coding

Before conducting open coding, researchers should not make assumptions in advance and must summarize the raw data word by word and sentence by sentence. During the process of open coding of interview data, I strive to retain the original interview language to ensure that the coding remains as close as possible to the original material. In the interviews with 6 young female university teachers, I extracted 17 categories as the content for open coding, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Open Coding Content of Interview Content with Young Female College Teachers

Number	Categories	Original events
1	Parental responsibilities lead to a reduction in available work time (04)	During the period immediately following the birth of a child, the absence of assistance from elderly family members in childcare has a significant impact on one's professional work.
2	Blurring of Work-Life Boundaries (03)	The work in universities does not have specific starting or ending times, hence it turns into a situation where you are working at all times.

3	Fertility Pressure (02)	I am currently preparing to have a child, but the pressure of childbirth is also present. In addition to work-related stress, there is significant pressure from balancing family responsibilities. Childbearing undoubtedly requires allocating more energy to the family, which will inevitably impact one's professional work.
...	...	...
17	Feeling pressured by the achievements of those around oneself (05)	Seeing others around me achieving particularly good results pressures me and makes me doubt my own abilities.

4.2 Further encoding and partitioning

Axial coding aids in clarifying the underlying logical structure between different categories through the analysis of internal logic among various categories, such as causal relationships and contextual connections, thereby forming a system of primary and secondary categories. Through analysis, I compared the 17 open coding contents across categories and linked the relationships and logic between concepts, ultimately synthesizing them into 6 axial codes. Subsequently, in the phase of selective coding, I further summarized these concepts based on the synthesized meanings and explored the relationships among these concepts, ultimately consolidating the 6 axial codes into 3 selective codes. Model explanation

4.3 Pressure on Female Roles

The pressure of female roles refers to the stress women face when juggling both professional and gender roles, playing multiple roles that contribute to their stress. Its impact on job burnout is manifested as one role suppressing the expression of another. When teachers return home to care for their children, it ultimately affects their professional performance, making it difficult for them to outperform male colleagues and limiting their competitive edge at work. For instance, an interviewee expressed: "My family hopes I can spend more time with the children, but as ongoing experiments demand my attention, I feel I cannot handle both tasks effectively, which makes every day feel like a never-ending cycle, leaving me exhausted." Young female teachers, under the dual pressures of family obligations and professional demands, find themselves in a high-load state where they must balance both career and family, ultimately leading to job burnout.

4.4 Expansion of work pressure

Work expansion pressure refers to the stress faced by university faculty members as their work tasks become increasingly diverse and performance indicators gradually become more challenging. As respondents have indicated: not only do we need to

handle research and teaching tasks, but we are also burdened with a series of administrative duties that consume our time, impacting our performance evaluations. The trivial administrative work encroaches upon the energy that teachers need for research and teaching, preventing them from realizing their own value in their work. The lack of a sense of value deconstructs teachers' professional identity, eventually leading them into occupational burnout. Meanwhile, the quantitative evaluation method under administrative logic also deconstructs teachers' recognition of their own competencies. On one hand, under high-performance pressure, young teachers are compelled to engage in internal competition to pursue better career development. On the other hand, limited social resources and increasing difficulty in publishing research outcomes lead to frequent setbacks in the competitive process. The intersection of obstacles and frustrations in realizing personal and job values, along with the deconstruction by mechanistic quantitative indicators and management-oriented institutional models, results in the loss of personal value and social value, causing teachers to face a crisis of being segmented as "whole individuals." This ultimately leads to the emergence of occupational burnout.

4.5 Achievement Orientation

Educational Psychology In higher education, a high achievement orientation refers to the psychological drive to pursue success and social standing, often characterized by a determination not to lag behind others. Among young female faculty members at universities, this manifests as strong self-expectations and anxiety triggered by the outstanding achievements of their peers. They are typically highly ambitious academically, placing significant importance on their accomplishments and setting lofty goals for themselves. As one interviewee noted, "I am not satisfied with my current research achievements; they do not meet my expectations. Seeing my colleagues achieve great success leads to self-doubt." While a high achievement orientation can provide motivation, it can also result in anxiety, especially given the current challenges in academic publishing. Persistent publication failures can exacerbate stress and peer pressure. When educators perceive a gap between their aspirations and reality, they are more susceptible to professional burnout.

5 Conclusion

In this study, interviews with six participants identified key factors contributing to occupational burnout, namely a high achievement orientation, work expansion pressure, and gender role stress. These findings offer significant practical insights for educational management bodies and higher education institutions, signaling the need to address specific stressors encountered by young female faculty members to enhance their job satisfaction and mental well-being.

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