

# Status and Prospects of Research on Occupational Stress and Mental Health of Young Teachers in Colleges and Universities

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**ABSTRACT.** *This paper uses a literature combing method to sort out domestic scholars' research on occupational stress, mental health, and related issues of Chinese college youth. It summarizes the research status and research content of domestic college young teachers on occupational stress, mental health, and the relationship between them. In terms of subdivision of research objects, improvement of research methods, and deepening of research content, we have considered and prospected the research trends of professional stress and mental health of young teachers in colleges and universities in China.*

**KEYWORDS:** *College young teachers; Occupational stress; Mental health*

## 1. Introduction

With the expansion policy of colleges and universities, the number and proportion of young teachers in colleges and universities have been increasing, and young teachers in colleges and universities have become the backbone of school development. Young teachers bear 60% to 80% of the teaching workload and play a pivotal role in teaching and research in universities. Their psychological state directly affects the quality of university education (Ping, 2015) [1]. The mental health of this group is related to the quality of education and teaching, and it is also closely related to the development of schools and comprehensive competitiveness. With the implementation of higher education reforms, the improvement of teachers' assessment standards by universities, and the requirements imposed on teachers by their own development, the young teacher group as a backbone also faces increasing pressure for career development, including career development, teaching Pressure on tasks, assessment of teaching and scientific research, appraisal and employment of professional titles. In recent years, some media reports and related studies have shown that the physical and mental health problems of young teachers in colleges and universities have become increasingly serious. The most important reason is the work stress factor. Zhang (2008) found that the obsessive-compulsive symptoms, paranoid tendencies and interpersonal sensitivity of college teachers are higher than those of the general population, and these symptoms are mainly affected by gender, professional title, education background, economic status, management environment and social support and other factors, mainly reflected in some teachers' poor self-control, weak interpersonal skills, easy to suspect and other psychological problems. Different job titles and teaching ages have a significant impact on the psychological status of young teachers in colleges and universities. Young teachers in colleges with more than 5 years of schooling experience has greater psychological pressure (He, Meng, Lou & Jia, 2015) [3]. Ping (2015) survey of the mental health of young teachers in colleges and universities in Heilongjiang Province found that more than 75% of young teachers obviously felt pressure from teachers' occupations. Among them, the top three pressures are scientific research pressure, economic pressure and teaching. Pressure [1]. Wang and Wang (2012) research shows that there are psychological problems such as anxiety, depression, job burnout, and interpersonal maladjustment among college teachers in China. These problems have become important hidden dangers affecting teachers' mental health [4].

Studies have found that 73.8% of young teachers sometimes feel lack of energy (Zhang, Cao, Zhao, Liang, Shi & Li, 2010) [5]. From 2004 to 2014, the research on mental health problems of young teachers in Chinese colleges and universities continued to expand, extending to somatization, interpersonal sensitivity, anxiety, depression, coercion, terror and other aspects (Huang & Zhang, 2004; Chen, 2014) [6] [7] It can be seen that the current work pressure of young teachers in colleges and universities is generally high, and it has already affected physical and mental health, which needs to be paid extensive attention by all sectors of society. Based on this, it is of great practical significance to analyze the current situation of young college teachers' occupational stress and mental health, to study the internal relationship between the two, to analyze the pressure sources that affect their mental health, and to explore the influence of occupational stress factors on their mental health, but

domestic scholars have not done enough research on the professional stress and mental health of young teachers in colleges and universities, which lags far behind the actual situation. The research content is not rich enough and the level is not deep. This article analyzes and summarizes the research literature on occupational stress and mental health problems of young teachers in Chinese colleges and universities included in the CNKI. The purpose is to analyze and summarize the research status and main research content of this problem, and to propose possible future research directions.

## 2. Core Concepts

(1) Young teachers in colleges and universities: According to scholar Li Guangqi's (1991) criteria for dividing youth ages [8], In this thesis, the age of young teachers in colleges and universities is defined as the group of teachers under 40 years old (including 40 years old) who specialize in teaching and scientific research in the forefront of colleges and universities.

(2) Occupational stress: The professional pressure mentioned in this paper mainly refers to the professional pressure faced by university teachers, also known as academic professional pressure, which refers to an unpleasant experience caused by teachers' work, such as tension, disappointment, anxiety, irritability and depression (delello, McWhorter, Marmion, camp, everling, Neel & marzilli, 2014) [9], which is often manifested as a continuous psychological and emotional state that will endanger the mental and physical health of individuals (Yan Guangcai, 2018) [10].

(3) Mental health: Mental health is an efficient and satisfying, continuous and aggressive good mental state (Yin Keli, 2011) [11]. Teachers' mental health is a necessary condition for teachers to maintain their healthy lives, and then engage in educational work to ultimately ensure the development of students' mental health.

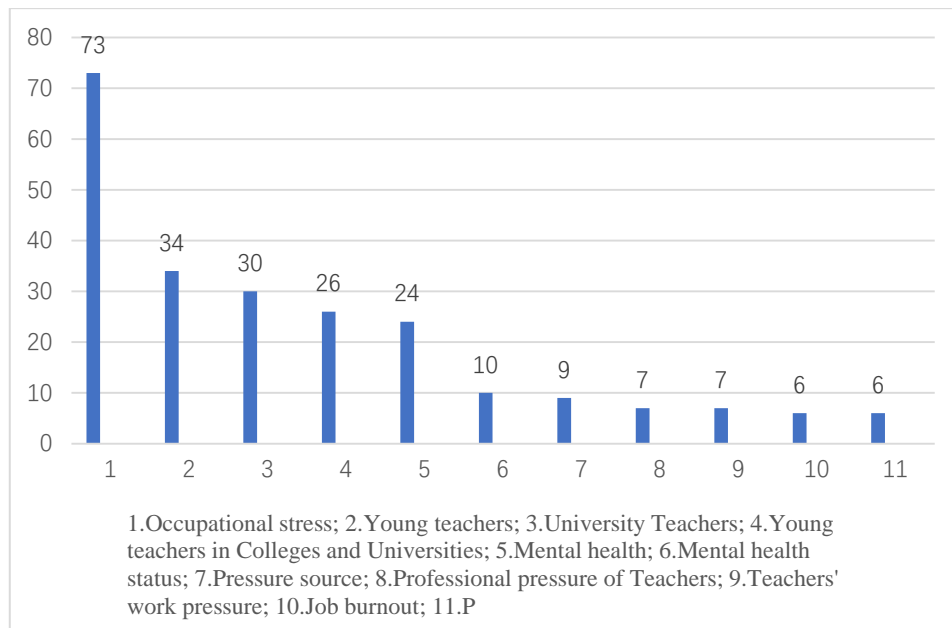
## 3. Research Status

### (1) Research data source

First of all, with the theme of "College Teachers", "occupational stress" and "mental health", or with the keywords of "occupational stress" and "mental health", a cross database search of "journals, doctors, masters, domestic conferences, international conferences, academic journals" was carried out, and a total of 302 research papers were obtained. During the search period, there were 143 journals, 151 master's theses and 8 doctoral dissertations. In general, the research on this issue by Chinese scholars began in 2004. Zhu (2004) analyzed the occupational stress of physical education teachers in colleges and universities, and called on the society and schools to pay attention to the occupational stress and mental health of physical education teachers in colleges and universities. [12]. Since then, the professional stress and mental health problems of university professors have gradually attracted scholars' attention. With the theme of "young college teachers", "occupational stress" and "mental health" again, or with the keywords "occupational stress" and "mental health", the "periodical, doctoral, master, domestic conferences, international conferences, academic series" Cross-database search yielded 107 research papers. During the research period of the search, there were 59 journals, 45 master's theses, 2 doctoral dissertations, and 1 conference dissertation. Chinese scholars take young teachers in colleges and universities as their research objects, and analyze their occupational stress and mental health problems. Research started in 2005. Liang (2005) analyzed the sources of occupational stress of young teachers in colleges and universities through investigations, and proposed self-psychological control strategies [13]. Zheng, Chen and Wang (2005) proposed the corresponding solutions to the relationship between work stress and mental health of young female teachers in colleges and universities [14]. Generally speaking, the research literature on young teachers' occupational stress and mental health in China is relatively small, and the research started late. Judging from the publication time of the literature, the research mainly started in 2005, but the overall research literature is not large, which shows that this issue has not attracted enough attention from scholars.

### (2) Research topic distribution

According to the results of statistical analysis, there are a total of 34 research topics in the published literature on young teachers' occupational stress and mental health in Chinese universities. High-frequency topics include occupational stress, young teachers, mental health, stressors, and burnout. 1) It shows that for the young teachers in colleges and universities, occupational stress, stressors and mental health are the focuses that scholars pay more attention to.



*Figure.1 High Frequency Subject Words in Research Literature on Occupational Stress and Mental Health of Young Teachers in Chinese Universities*

#### 4. Research Content

Based on the literature search results, the research contents of the research on the relationship between occupational stress, mental health, occupational stress and mental health of young teachers in Chinese universities are analyzed and sorted out.

##### (1) Occupational stress of young teachers in colleges

It mainly includes the analysis of the stress source of young teachers in colleges, the measurement of occupational stress and the coping with stress. In the study of the stressors of young teachers in colleges, there are two main research directions, one is the psychological stressors of college teachers, and the other is the work stressors. Shen (2007) research shows that personal development, teaching and management, academic research, promotion evaluation and assessment factors are the main sources of professional stress for young teachers in colleges and universities [15]. Wang (2004) survey found that young teachers in colleges and universities generally feel psychological pressure, and the main sources of pressure are: social expectations, work burden, interpersonal communication, etc. [16]. Liu, Yu, Xu and Sun (2017) subdivided the occupational stress of young teachers in colleges and universities into occupational survival pressure, career development pressure, economic income pressure, interpersonal relationship pressure, living environment pressure and affairs management pressure [17].

In terms of measurement methods, the domestic occupational stress measurement of young teachers in colleges and universities is mainly based on directly borrowing foreign mature stress measurement scales. More commonly used is the Survey of Work Stress and Work Stress Responses compiled by the University of South Florida (Wang, 2017) [18]. The application of a mature measurement scale guarantees the scientificity and rigor of the measurement. However, due to the differences between Chinese and Western cultures, the subject's understanding of the measurement problem will have certain deviations, which may affect the accuracy of the measurement results. Therefore, some domestic scholars have modified the original questionnaire to comply with Chinese culture and context. For example, Wang, Liu and Wu (2003) used the revised Teacher Burnout Scale to study related issues [19].

In terms of coping strategies, scholars put forward some corresponding countermeasures mainly from the social, school and personal perspectives. Liu, Yu, Xu and sun (2017) suggested that we should build a scientific career evaluation system, create a good environment for young teachers' career growth, improve the welfare of young teachers, and establish a systematic training mechanism [17]. Wang (2004) suggested that in the reform of the teacher management system and performance evaluation system, a fair, reasonable, open and orderly competitive environment should be created for young teachers to meet the reasonable needs of young teachers'

career development [16]. From a personal point of view, young teachers in Colleges and universities should base themselves on teaching, lay a solid foundation for career development and improve their scientific research ability (Hou & Tian, 2018) [20].

#### (2) Mental health of young teachers in colleges

Scholars' research on this issue is relatively single, mainly focusing on the current situation of young college teachers' mental health, the influencing factors and coping strategies. Gao (2018) analyzes the causes of psychological stress of young teachers in colleges and universities. Young teachers are burdened with teaching tasks. At the same time, they require a large number of scientific research results to be produced in a short period of time. There is fierce competition among teachers, and young teachers have a weak financial foundation and a heavy living burden [ twenty one]. Zhang (2012) studied the relationship between social support and the mental health of young teachers in colleges and universities from the perspective of social support theory. The study found that a higher proportion of young teachers in colleges had psychological problems, and more than one third of young teachers had mental health problems of different degrees, of which 28.8% had mild to moderate mental health problems, and 9.2% had moderate to severe mental health problems [22]. In addition, the mental health of young teachers in colleges and universities is significantly different due to different characteristics such as gender, age, education, marital status, economic status, and job title. Tao (2004) found that gender, current health status, and workload had significant effects on mental health among the factors affecting mental health through regression analysis [23]. Among them, the mental health level of young female teachers is better than that of young male teachers, and the worse the health status is, the worse the mental health level is.

#### (3) The relationship between occupational stress and mental health of young teachers in colleges and universities

The research on related issues mainly explores the relationship between the occupational stress and mental health of college teachers, and there is very little literature on young teachers. Su (2016) used a structural equation model to analyze the mediating effect of the psychological elasticity of young teachers in colleges and universities on the relationship between professional stress and well-being [24]. Feng, Wang and Zhang (2015) analyzed the relationship between work pressure and mental health of young teachers in colleges and universities through questionnaire analysis. The results found that young teachers in colleges felt obvious in academic research, teaching, promotion and workload Work stress; prone to mental health problems such as obsessive-compulsive, depression, anxiety, and interpersonal sensitivity; academic research and promotion stress have no significant predictive effect on total mental health scores [25]. The research on related issues is mainly aimed at college teachers, and the research objects have not been subdivided. Many scholars have applied the SCL-90 Symptom Self-Assessment Scale and Occupational Stress Scale to a questionnaire survey of college teachers, and analyzed it with SPSS statistical software to conduct an empirical study on the correlation between mental health and occupational stress of college teachers (Zhang Huxiang, Zhang Shenglin, Yang Jianwen, 2009; Zhu Xiaozheng, Yang Shaoqing, Peng Yan, 2011) [26] [27].

## 5. Research Review

According to the existing research results, it is found that the research on related issues in China mainly uses college teachers and counselors as research objects, and there is less research on the related issues of young teachers in colleges and universities. In terms of research content, existing research content involves the sources of occupational stress of young teachers in colleges and universities, the survey and evaluation of overall mental health status, influencing factors of mental health, the correlation between occupational stress and mental health, and countermeasures for mental health issues. On the whole, there is still some content that is less involved or needs to be deepened. The research methods mainly include survey method, SCL-90 measurement method, case method, and literature analysis method. In the early period, literature analysis was the main method. In recent years, empirical research was the main method, but there were few large-scale and large-sample researches, and there was no long-term and continuous special research.

With the deepening of theoretical research on mental health, it is necessary to carry out multi-disciplinary integration research, subdivide the research objects of university teachers, including young and middle-aged teachers, middle-aged and old teachers, teaching assistants, etc., and pay attention to the research and analysis of the factors affecting the occupational well-being, job satisfaction and occupational stress of university teachers. In terms of research methods, qualitative research and quantitative research, individual research and overall research, theoretical research and application research are combined to further expand the research content, pay attention to the depth of research, and pay attention to the healthy development of young college teachers.

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