

# A Policy Brief Towards Improving Mental Health Support Structures for Teachers in Shengli Middle School

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## Abstract:

Teachers are particularly susceptible to job burnout, ranking third in a survey of occupational burnout across 15 industries. Teacher burnout is an extreme reaction when teachers are unable to cope with work pressures, directly linked to factors such as age, teaching experience, personality, social support, and personal achievements. This study employs a qualitative research approach, conducting interviews with middle school teachers to understand their mental health and needs, and explore potential solutions. The findings emphasize the need for policy support, salary improvement, establishment of home-school communication mechanisms, and a better understanding of teachers' challenges and work conditions.

**Keywords:** Mental health; Job Burnout; Middle School Teachers

## 1. Introduction

The in-depth advancement of education reform in China has made the psychological well-being of teachers a focal point (Wang, 2010). Scholars have summarized the research status, tools, evaluation criteria, and research subjects related to the psychological well-being of Chinese teachers, and have put forward development suggestions (Liu, 2014).

The psychological well-being of secondary school teachers is influenced by multiple factors. Firstly, the reform of the university system and policies has brought new opportunities and challenges for teachers (Zhang, 2014). Secondly, social pressure arises from the unique nature of the teaching profession, where teachers must embrace the concept of lifelong learning, continuously expand their horizons, and update their knowledge structures in order to cope with the trends of educational reform. Thirdly, there is work-related stress as most teachers are burdened with additional teaching tasks on top of their existing responsibilities, leading to a heavy workload. Therefore, this study focuses on the psychological well-being of secondary school teachers and proposes school and policy recommendations through a series of research efforts to promote improvement.

## 2. Literature Review

In the research and discussion on the evaluation criteria for psychological well-being, experts and scholars have put forward their respective viewpoints. Huang Jianhou (1976) proposed four criteria for psychological well-being: work motivation, objective self-understanding, establishing harmonious relationships with others, and exposure to a favorable environment. The standards for teachers'

psychological well-being should include both general criteria and criteria specific to teachers. Wu Sixiao (2003) pointed out that psychologically healthy teachers should possess a love for education and teaching, a positive and optimistic attitude, good character traits, adaptability, and interpersonal skills. Sun Mingzhong (2003) believed that the standards for teachers' psychological well-being include a love for the profession, harmonious interpersonal relationships, a correct understanding of oneself, good qualities, and firm beliefs.

In the West, research on teachers' psychological well-being has been underway for some time. Shipley (1961) found that about one-fourth of Americans had difficulties in adaptation, with the proportion being even higher among teachers, reaching one-third. Studies on maladjustment among American teachers showed that out of a random sample of 600 individuals, 17.5% suffered from neurosis. Among 35,000 teachers in New York, 4% had mental disorders, and 13% required treatment. In China, investigations and studies on teachers' psychological well-being began in the 1990s. In 1993, Jadeshian published an analysis of the evaluation results of the SCL-90 for primary and secondary school teachers in the "Chinese Journal of Mental Health." Since then, many scholars have started to investigate and study the psychological well-being status of teachers.

In recent years, teachers' psychological well-being has become a hot topic of social concern, driven by the increasing emphasis on teacher professionalism and the awareness of the potential harm teachers may face in terms of students' psychological well-being. Surveys conducted both domestically and internationally indicate that the psychological well-being status of primary and secondary school teachers is not optimistic. However, existing research mainly consists of theoretical analysis and descriptive studies, lacking objective understanding and evaluation of teacher issues. There is a need to propose more rational, practical, and effective strategies to address these problems (Zhang, 2014).

### 3. Problem Statement

Existing research categorizes the factors influencing teachers' psychological well-being into two categories: personal factors and environmental factors. Zhu Xiaocui et al. conducted measurements and analysis on teachers at a university in Tangshan and found that social pressure, school pressure, and personal pressure were related to psychological well-being, with personal pressure being the most significant factor (Liu, 2014). They believed that better character traits can help teachers maintain good physical health and reduce the impact of negative emotions. In addressing the psychological condition of teachers, the author intends to conduct research from the following three aspects and propose the following three research questions:

1. What are the current mental health support structures for teachers in middle school?
2. What are the main challenges and barriers faced by teachers in accessing mental health support in middle school?

What policy recommendations can be proposed to improve mental health support structures for teachers in middle school?

This study will primarily employ qualitative research in the form of interviews. Therefore, a middle school teacher will be selected to participate in the research experiment, and a sample of middle schools that the author is familiar with during their studies will be chosen. With the school's permission, teachers from grades one, two, and three will be selected for stratified sampling interviews, and the conversations will be recorded. Subsequently, a transcription study of the corpus will be conducted.

#### 4. Significant of the Study

This study aims to improve the psychological well-being of middle school teachers and optimize their overall qualities. Additionally, it is important to note that the primary and secondary school stages are crucial periods for the formation of students' personality traits (Qin, 2009). Therefore, the findings of this research will benefit students by promoting their healthy development.

#### 5. Methodology

The author adopts a qualitative research method to conduct the study, and conducts this study through interviews.

The author used a literature review method, referring to a certain number of relevant literature on the mental health of primary and secondary school teachers, including books and academic journals, to understand and master the research status and main influencing factors of teacher mental health at home and abroad. The author synthesized various research results, laying a foundation for topic selection and paper writing.

An interview is a research dialogue. The method of collecting objective and fair factual materials in oral form to accurately explain the overall situation represented by the sample.

#### 6. Analyze and explanation

In terms of the current mental health support structures for middle school teachers, several aspects have been identified. Firstly, schools have increased financial support and continue to provide salary subsidies for teachers. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance jointly issued a notice requiring the implementation of teacher salary guarantees, emphasizing that local authorities should ensure timely payment of teacher salaries, participation in social insurance as required, and timely salary increases for teachers willing to remain in their positions, with steady growth at a certain rate (Shengli, 2020). The viewpoints of the teachers who participated in the interviews were collected by the author, and the main ideas gathered and derived can be summarized into two points: low salary levels and insufficient benefits.

Secondly, in terms of professional development plans, the author utilized some policies from the school's professional development programs to help or protect teachers' psychological well-being. These include creating a harmonious working environment for teachers, providing psychological counseling for teachers, and conducting regular mental health lectures. However, teachers still express varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the school's management system, which affects their psychological well-being.

The final influencing factor is policies. Schools have actively formulated some response policies for psychological well-being, such as establishing a professional team of teachers for mental health, actively liaising with county-level full-time or part-time psychological health teachers with national counseling qualifications, and establishing pandemic psychological support groups.

Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to financial support, career development, and policies.

For policy considerations to improve the mental health support structures for teachers at Shengli Middle School, the following measures can be taken:

Policy 1: Increase salaries and improve teacher benefits

Outcome: Raise teachers' salaries, increase job satisfaction, and improve teachers' quality of life.

Policy 2: Invest in teacher development and provide financial support

Outcome: Increase the financial resources available to teachers, raise teachers' overall income, and cultivate teachers' teaching interests.

Policy 3: Human-centered education philosophy

Outcome: Establish an education system that prioritizes students' needs and well-being and promotes their overall development.

Policy 4: Promote mental health knowledge among teachers

Outcome: Equip teachers with necessary knowledge and skills to support students' mental health and well-being.

Policy 5: Strengthen mental health education and stress management

Outcome: Enhance the provision of mental health courses and promptly address various stressors faced by individuals.

Policy 6: Strengthen collaborative efforts between schools, families, and the community

Outcome: Foster cooperation among schools, families, and the broader community to promote mental health and well-being.

Policy 7: Implement effective mental health assessments

Outcome: Establish a robust system to assess and monitor the psychological well-being in the educational environment.

## 7. Summary and Conclusions

This study provides a comprehensive understanding of the mental health and needs of local middle school teachers through interviews and analysis. The research findings are as follows:

Shengli School has some basic policies and measures to ensure the mental health of its teachers.

There are still some shortcomings in the mental health infrastructure of provincial-level middle schools.

The province's middle schools exhibit noticeable deficiencies in terms of psychological counseling and financial expenditures.

Based on the research findings, the author proposes the following recommendations:

Firstly, Shengli School needs to adjust its measures according to the local context and propose more feasible policies and strategies to enhance the mental health and psychological safety of teachers. In terms of finances, teachers need increased income, and in terms of career advancement, they need recognition and encouragement to boost their enthusiasm for teaching and work. Secondly, Shengli School should improve the teaching arrangements for teachers. Thirdly, it would be beneficial for the mass media to pay attention to the mental health of teachers. Lastly, Shengli School should develop long-term policies based on local conditions, school development, and the psychological well-being of teachers.

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