

The Relationship Between Job Burnout and Effort-Reward Imbalance of College Counselors

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Abstract: In recent years, there has been a growing demand for specialized and professional college counselors. However, the stability of the counseling team is compromised by a high turnover rate, and their professional development is challenged by practical difficulties, including ambiguous professional identity, unclear job responsibilities, and significant job burnout. This study concentrates on the work burnout of college counselors, employing a questionnaire method to investigate the current state of job burnout, the imbalance of effort and reward, and the overcommitment among these professionals. It also analyzes the relationship between job burnout and effort-reward imbalance to explore the factors influencing job burnout and propose strategies for improvement. The conclusion indicates that college counselors generally experience mild job burnout, a balance between effort and reward, and a high level of overcommitment, which acts as a moderating factor between job burnout and effort-reward imbalance.

Keywords: Effort-Reward Imbalance; Overcommitment; Job Burnout; Career Development

1. Introduction

In recent years, the ideological and political education of college students has faced significant challenges due to domestic and international social, political, and economic changes. As the mainstay of this education, college counselors, who are responsible for daily ideological and political education and management, have seen a growing demand for their specialization and professional development. However, the counselor team is experiencing instability and a high turnover rate, and their specialization and professional

development are encountering practical difficulties, such as ambiguous professional identity, unclear job responsibilities, and pronounced job burnout.

To explore the realities of college counselors' work and the factors affecting their working status, this study selected college counselors as the research subject. It investigates the current situation of counselor job burnout, the imbalance between effort and reward, overcommitment. The study also examines the differences in demographic variables and the relationship between job burnout and effort-reward imbalance to analyze the causes of job burnout. The aim is to provide empirical evidence and countermeasures to alleviate counselor job burnout and stabilize the counselor team.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Job Burnout

Job burnout is a state of exhaustion that encompasses physiological, emotional, and behavioral aspects, resulting from individuals' inability to cope with excessive demands that deplete personal energy and resources. This condition manifests as emotional exhaustion, dehumanization, and a diminished sense of personal achievement [1]. High job demands coupled with insufficient work resources can precipitate job burnout [2]. Counselors experiencing job burnout are prone to depression, negativity, and a pessimistic outlook on their emotions, attitudes towards students and colleagues, self-evaluation, and sense of values. This burnout not only impacts work effectiveness but may also lead to resignation behaviors.

2.2 Effort-Reward Imbalance and Overcommitment

The Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) is a work stress model that emphasizes the relationship between effort and reward in the workplace. The theory posits that the time and energy expended at work should be compensated with pay, respect, and career development opportunities. When an organization fails to provide employees with the corresponding returns, this perceived imbalance may lead to changes in work status, such as tardiness, early departure, absenteeism, burnout, and dissatisfaction. The model is proposed with three main theoretical assumptions, namely: external hypothesis, internal hypothesis and interaction hypothesis [3].

Eum et al. (2007) sampled workers from Korean oil companies and discovered that an imbalance between effort and reward, along with excessive investment, can lead to poor physical and mental health. In other words, effort-reward imbalance and excessive investment can significantly predict physical and mental health issues [4]. Xie et al. (2021) found that the imbalance between effort and reward had a significant positive predictive effect on the anxiety levels of young college teachers [5]. Chu et al. (2018) posited that an imbalance between effort and reward, coupled with excessive emotional investment, can result in college teachers' resignation tendencies [6].

In recent years, the Ministry of Education has consistently advocated for strengthening the construction of college counselors. However, in terms of counselor post allowances and strictly controlling the number of counselor shifts, the implementation of these policies has been linked to the study of job burnout among college counselors and the relationship between post allowances and work returns. Controlling the upper limit of the number of students managed by counselors is directly related to the workload of counselors, which in turn is related to work returns. In summary, conducting research on the work of college counselors under the new situation is of practical significance.

2.3 The Relationship between Job Burnout and Effort-Reward Imbalance

Building on the dual social exchange model,

Schaufeli (1996) and Van Dierendonck (1996) proposed that a lack of reciprocity at the organizational level leads to burnout [7]. Maslach and Leiter (1997) indicated that job burnout is not solely due to work or the individual, but rather to the degree of match or mismatch between the two: the greater the disparity, the more likely burnout is to occur [8]. Dierendonck (1996) demonstrated that injustice is associated with burnout, particularly the dimension of emotional exhaustion, with employees who feel unfairly treated experiencing more negative emotions and burnout [9]. According to the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) model, when effort significantly outweighs reward, individuals are considered to be in a state of stress, which can jeopardize the physical and mental health of employees. Those with characteristics of overload are more prone to feeling work pressure and are likely to exhibit various physical and mental symptoms by overestimating their efforts. Studies across various occupational groups have found that the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) is associated with job burnout [10]. The imbalance between effort and reward, often resulting from job promotions and assessments, is identified as the organizational factor that leads to job burnout [11]. An imbalance in effort and reward exacerbates burnout [12]. There is no interaction effect between the imbalance of effort and reward and overcommitment [13]. Effort has the greatest impact on job burnout, followed by overcommitment, with the least impact on reward. The new ternary effort-reward model can be applied to the nursing group [14]. In conclusion, scholars have found that both effort-reward imbalance and overcommitment affect job burnout, yet there remains considerable diversity in perspectives and conclusions regarding the mechanisms of action. This topic still requires extensive discussion across different groups.

3. Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: College counselors have job burnout.

Hypothesis 2: Job burnout, imbalance of effort and reward, overcommitment are associated with demographic variables such as gender.

Hypothesis 3: The job burnout of college counselors is related to the effort-reward imbalance and overcommitment.

Hypothesis 4: Overcommitment can mediate the relationship between the effort-reward imbalance and job burnout.

4. Method

4.1 Sample Analysis (N=234)

The research selected full-time counselors as its subjects and employed a stratified sampling method to extract a sample of 300 individuals from the pool of full-time counselors at 12 universities. Out of the 300 distributed questionnaires, 234 were effectively returned, yielding an effective recovery rate of 78%. The demographic variables of the sample, taken as a whole, indicate that the basic composition aligns with the general characteristics of full-time counselors: a higher proportion of females to males, a relatively younger team, and a scarcity of senior titles. The current state of the pyramid rank configuration structure is such that the sample can more objectively reflect the overall characteristics.

4.2 Instrument

This study used questionnaire survey, questionnaire includes: demographic information, effort-reward imbalance scale, job burnout scale, a total of 45 items. The clonal bach coefficient of the effort-reward imbalance scale, job burnout scale are 0.728,0.869 respectively. The study used SPSS for statistical analysis. Because the two scales are rarely used in the college counselor group, the necessary item analysis, reliability analysis and validity analysis are conducted through pre-test. A total of 50 questionnaires were distributed for the pre-test. Using extreme group tests and factor analysis, 33 items were retained in the revised scale.

The α coefficient of ERI scale is 0.889, and each dimensions are 0.908, 0.866, 0.795, with good reliability. The α coefficient of job burnout scale is 0.899 and each dimension are 0, 933, 0.901 and 0.892.

5. Findings

5.1 Description of the Statistical Results of the Variables

5.1.1 Overall performance of job burnout

Due to the adjustment of items in the scale, the score for job burnout was below 2.5, indicating good working conditions; a score between 2.5 and 3.75 indicates mild work burnout, suggesting the need for self-psychological adjustment; a score between 3.75 and 5 suggests moderate work burnout, recommending a period of adjustment; a score above 5 signifies severe job burnout. The college counselor burnout score was 3.26, confirming Hypothesis 1. Among the components, emotional exhaustion was 3.71, depersonalization was 3.28, and reduced personal accomplishment was 2.81. 50% of samples showed moderate job burnout, 21% showed mild job burnout, and 2% showed severe job burnout. 47% had low burnout, 9% had moderate burnout, and 2% had severe burnout.

5.1.2 Overall performance of the effort-Reward imbalance and overcommitment

The scale, revised for 12 projects, calculates the effort-reward imbalance index using the formula $E / (R * C)$, where E represents the total effort score, R the reward score, and C the coefficient. A result greater than 1 and close to 2 indicates a reward imbalance, with higher values signifying a greater imbalance. Conversely, a result less than or equal to 1 signifies a reward balance state. An overcommitment score exceeding 10 points indicates a high level of overcommitment. The reward coefficient was 1.03, and the overcommitment score surpassed 10 points. College counselors experienced an effort-reward imbalance of 33%, with 46% reporting high effort, 36% low reward, and 60% overcommitment.

5.1.3 Effect of demographic variables on job burnout and effort-reward imbalance

This survey is for college counselors, who are measured based on personal perception. Their varying demographic characteristics may influence their perceptions of job burnout and effort-reward imbalance. Utilizing the average score of work burnout, the effort-reward imbalance coefficient, and six components (dimensions) as dependent variables, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on gender, college type, marital status, title, position, working experience, and number of students under supervision to ascertain the differences among various demographic groups.

Firstly, ascertain if the variance is homogeneous. Apart from gender and diminished sense of personal achievement, gender and effort-reward coefficient, title and effort, college type and emotional exhaustion, position and the reward, position and diminished sense of personal achievement, the number of students under supervision and diminished sense of personal achievement with a variance significance less than 0.05, the variances of other demographic variables are homogeneous.

Homogeneity of variance was assessed through one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), while differences characterized by uneven variance were evaluated using an independent samples T-test.

The results of the ANOVA indicated that the significance level for overcommitment was 0.017, and for job burnout, it was 0.040. The intergroup significance levels for emotional exhaustion, high effort, and effort-reward ratio among counselors in different positions were 0.043, 0.000, and 0.004, respectively. Additionally, the intergroup significance levels for depersonalization and high effort among counselors with varying professional titles were 0.023 and 0.024, respectively, both of which were below the significance threshold of 0.05.

The refined analysis via Independent sample T-test indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in the effort-reward coefficient between counselors of different genders, with a significance level of 0.043. Additionally, emotional exhaustion varies significantly among counselors from different types of colleges, with a p-value of 0.029. There is also a notable distinction in the rewards experienced by counselors holding positions as Secretary of Youth League Committee versus deputy leader of department, with a significance level of 0.015. Furthermore, counselors with different professional titles exhibit a significant difference in their levels of effort, with a p-value of 0.026, all of which are below the threshold of 0.05, indicating significant disparities. In summary, the imbalance in effort-reward, overcommitment, and job burnout are linked to demographic variables including gender, type of college, position, and professional title, thereby supporting part of Hypothesis 2 as true.

5.2 The Relationship between Job Burnout and Effort-Reward Imbalance, Overcommitment

5.2.1 The correlation between job burnout and effort-reward imbalance and overcommitment Scale dimensions are variables of a continuous nature, and their interrelation is non-linear; therefore, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is utilized. The findings reveal that the effort-reward ratio demonstrates a positive correlation with job burnout, including emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, at a confidence level of 0.01. Additionally, it shows a positive correlation with reduced personal accomplishment at a confidence level of 0.05. Effort itself is positively correlated with job burnout, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization at a confidence level of 0.01. Conversely, reward is negatively associated with job burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment at the same confidence level. Furthermore, overcommitment exhibits a positive correlation with job burnout, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization at a confidence level of 0.01. It is evident that the imbalance in the effort-reward ratio, along with effort, reward, and overcommitment, are all significantly correlated with job burnout, thereby affirming Hypothesis 3.

5.2.2 The moderation analysis of overcommitment on the effort-reward imbalance, effort, reward and job burnout Overcommitment can moderate the relationship between effort-reward imbalance and various outcomes, including emotional exhaustion, occupational efficacy, satisfaction with individual psychological load, and satisfaction with colleague support [14]. Linear regression analysis was employed to investigate the moderating role of overcommitment in the relationship between effort-reward imbalance and job burnout. The results, as presented in **Table 1**, partially confirm Hypothesis 4.

As shown in **Table 1**, Model 1 demonstrates the negative impact of reward on job burnout. Additionally, it reveals the interaction effect of reward and overcommitment on job burnout, as well as the individual effect of reward on job burnout. Notably, the effect magnitude shifts from -0.071 to -0.57, indicating an increase in the absolute value and, consequently, a stronger influence. This

evidence supports the conclusion that overcommitment positively moderates the relationship between reward and job burnout.

Table 1. Reward * Overcommitment Regression Coefficient

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	2.719***		2.702***
Reward	-0.071***	-0.061***	-0.57***
Overcommitment		0.014***	0.070***
Reward * Overcommitment			-0.006***
R square	0.232	0.300	0.313
Adjust R square	0.229	0.293	0.304
F value	70.097	49.383	34.858
Dependent variable: job burnout. *** for Sig. 0.001, ** for Sig. 0.01, and * for Sig. 0.05.			

6. Discussion

6.1 The Overall Performance of Job Burnout and Effort-Reward Imbalance of College Counselors

There is a notable occurrence of job burnout among college counselors, with the overall severity being mild. Specifically, the level of emotional exhaustion is higher than that of depersonalization, and both are more pronounced than the reduction in personal accomplishment. The effort-reward balance for these counselors is generally stable, albeit accompanied by a high level of overcommitment.

6.2 Differences in Demographic Variables

By comparing the differences among various demographic variables, it was observed that female counselors exhibit significantly higher levels of overcommitment and effort-reward imbalance compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, the emotional exhaustion and job burnout experienced by counselors in higher vocational colleges are notably greater than those in undergraduate colleges. There are also significant variations in emotional exhaustion, effort and effort-reward coefficient among counselors holding different positions. Specifically, the secretary (deputy secretary) of the Youth League demonstrates significantly higher levels than departmental student (employment) affairs officers, who in turn exhibit higher levels than counselors without any other position, and the deputy leader of department in the lowest level. Concurrently, the reward for the secretary (deputy secretary)

of the General Branch of the Youth League is markedly lower than that of the deputy leader of department.

Furthermore, counselors with different professional titles display significant differences in depersonalization, reward, and effort. Notably, counselors with associate senior titles exhibit a significantly higher degree of depersonalization than those with junior, intermediate, or no professional titles. The reward for associate senior counselors is significantly lower than that for intermediate title holders and also lower than that for junior title holders. Counselors without a professional title receive the highest reward. Additionally, the effort exerted by counselors with intermediate professional titles is significantly greater than that of counselors without any professional titles.

It is evident that greater emphasis should be placed on the professional status of female counselors, counselors in higher vocational colleges, those serving as secretaries of the Youth League general branch, and deputy senior title counselors.

6.3 The Relationship of Job Burnout and Effort-Reward Imbalance and Overcommitment

The higher the overcommitment level, the greater the impact of reward on job burnout; the lower the overcommitment level, the less the effect of reward on job burnout. It can be seen that reducing the sense of overcommitment in counselors' work plays an important role in alleviating the impact of reward on job burnout.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Enhance the Development of Professional Capabilities for Counselors across Various Levels and Types

Based on the results of this survey, it is evident that counselors at different levels and types exhibit significantly distinct work statuses and career sentiments, which may be attributed to their varying career expectations and sources of pressure. Currently, the Ministry of Education places a high priority on the training of counselors and the enhancement of their professional capabilities. It regularly organizes professional development programs, various competitions, scientific research projects, and

advanced selection processes, thereby playing a pivotal and exemplary role in centralized management and training.

At the school level, to fortify counselor development, greater emphasis can be placed on refined management, setting diverse career development goals, and Arrange the work tasks reasonably; attention should also be given to addressing the unique needs of counselors. Additionally, leveraging the establishment of counselor studios and teaching-research teams can fully harness the "passing, helping, and leading" roles. Adopting an "inviting in and going out" strategy can further meet the advanced career development needs of counselors, thereby fostering their personalized, professional, and specialized growth.

7.2 Adopt Effective Strategies to Mitigate the Overcommitted Working Conditions of Counselors

The survey indicates that the counselors are grappling with a substantial workload currently, primarily due to the unavoidable overtime necessitated by daily management duties (such as late-night inspections and holiday safety checks), as well as heightened efforts in managing emergencies and addressing students' psychological concerns. Schools should prioritize the development of pertinent management systems specifically designed to accommodate the unique working dynamics of counselors. This entails establishing seamless peer communication channels, ensuring optimal working conditions and welfare benefits for counselors on duty and those working overtime, and conducting evaluations and assessments grounded in their actual performance.

Additionally, it is essential to focus on the emotional and life states of counselors, harnessing team strength to effectively manage student emergencies and alleviate work-related stress. Emphasizing the core responsibilities and duties of counselors, enhancing their competencies, and overcoming workplace challenges through the establishment of a learning team is paramount.

Moreover, by fostering greater intrinsic motivation among counselors and encouraging them to innovate methods and approaches in ideological and political education through the use of new media and technology, passive

responses can be transformed into proactive prevention and resolution of conflicts. This strategy not only alleviates counselors' work pressure but also helps maintain their psychological equilibrium.

Combined with the characteristics and working rules of college counselors, this paper objectively analyzes the current situation of job burnout and the influence of effort-reward imbalance, and provides working ideas for alleviating the job burnout of counselors and strengthening the capacity of counselors. In the subsequent research, we can further explore the source of job burnout of college counselors, or do more in-depth research on a certain type of counselors, so as to provide more effective ways and feasible ways for the stability of counselors and the improvement of professional ability.

Acknowledgments

This paper is supported by 2024 Guangxi Higher Education Ideological and Political Education Theory and Practice Research Project: Enhancing the Political Leadership Capacity of Counselors in Normal Universities in the New Era (No. 2024SZ174).

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