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Article

Work Stress of Young Lecturers in Beijing, China: An In-depth Analysis Based on Grounded Theory

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Abstract

With the deepening of the reform of the personnel system in higher education, the problem of occupational stress among young teachers in colleges and universities has become increasingly prominent. Existing studies mostly rely on quantitative methods, and the complex internal mechanism of stress formation is not sufficiently explored. This study takes young teachers in Beijing, China universities as the research object, adopts grounded theory, and conducts semi-structured in-depth interviews with 12 interviewees. Through three-level coding, three core categories of "individual characteristics - organizational system - environmental interaction" are extracted to construct a dynamic generation model of occupational stress. The study reveals that the three interact through "high personal requirements - organizational system constraints - generalized social expectations" to form a "stress spiral", individual characteristics regulate stress perception, organizational system defects are the key hub, and environmental factors indirectly amplify stress. The model structure has engaged in dialogue and verification with classic stress models outside China, and at the same time has deepened the analysis of the stress generation mechanism adapted to the local context. Based on this, a three-dimensional "targeted-collaborative" intervention path is proposed, which provides empirical evidence for universities to formulate precise teacher support policies and injects a localized perspective into occupational stress theory.

Keywords

Occupational stress, Young university lecturers, Grounded theory, Formation mechanism, Individual-organisation-environment model construction

Article History

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1. Introduction

In recent years, with the continuous expansion of higher education and the deepening of personnel system reforms, the ranks of young teachers in universities have grown, but their professional ecology has become increasingly complex. According to data from the "China Education Statistics Yearbook," the number of young teachers in universities has increased significantly over the past decade, with full-time teachers aged 45 and below (including 29 and below, 30-34, 35-39, and 40-44) totaling 1,075,600, accounting for 58.7% of the total number of full-time teachers, making them the core body of the university teaching staff [1]; however, their job satisfaction and mental health status have shown a downward trend. The meta-analysis conducted by Yu Guoliang's team on the mental health status of university teachers in China from 2000 to 2022 shows that the overall depression rate among university teachers in China is 21.3%, and the anxiety rate is 18.6%. Among these, the upward trend of anxiety problems over the years is particularly significant. From 2018 to 2022, the anxiety rate among young teachers increased to 31.0%, and the depression rate among young teachers in ordinary universities reached as high as 24.1%. Moreover, the problem of job burnout among young teachers has become increasingly prominent as the industry develops, and it has become a typical psychological problem for this group [2]. Existing research has confirmed that rigid scientific research assessments, fierce competition for professional titles, and the promotion of the "non-tenure track" employment system are the core sources of stress for this group. However, existing research relies heavily on quantitative questionnaires, and the depth of exploration into the complex internal mechanisms of stress formation and individual subjective experiences is limited.

This study aims to deeply explore the current situation and main influencing factors of occupational stress among young teachers in universities in the Beijing, China area, in order to provide universities with scientific and effective stress management and intervention strategies.

Universities in the Beijing, China area have concentrated resources, and their professional competition and development environment are typical, providing an ideal context for studying the complex mechanisms of occupational stress among young teachers. In order to deeply reveal the complex causes and mechanisms of occupational stress in this group, this study adopts the grounded theory, a qualitative research method, and through systematic coding and analysis of in-depth interview data, the core sources and mechanisms of stress naturally emerge from the real experiences and subjective narratives of teachers, thereby constructing a theoretical model that reflects the complexity of reality.

Based on this, this study aims to systematically explore the following core questions through the grounded theory method:

(1) Core sources and formation mechanisms of occupational stress for young teachers in Beijing, China universities; (2) Interactive effects of individual, organizational and environmental factors on young teachers' stress experiences.

Through the exploration of the above questions, this study hopes to construct an occupational stress theoretical model based on empirical data, provide a new perspective for understanding the internal generation logic of occupational stress among young teachers, and provide a theoretical basis and practical reference for universities to implement more targeted and precise teacher support policies.

2. Theoretical Basis and Research Design

2.1 Definition of Core Concepts and Theoretical Basis

The discussion on occupational stress was gradually explored in depth by Western countries in the second half of the 20th century. In 1974, Freudenberger proposed the concept of "occupational stress," emphasizing its impact on individuals. He suggested that there is a common state of emotional exhaustion among workers in the helping professions, such as psychological counselors, doctors, and teachers. China scholars' research on occupational stress among young people in colleges and universities mainly focuses on the following three aspects: (1) The sources and characteristics of occupational stress in this group; (2) Empirical investigations revealing the impact of stress, affecting psychological and physiological manifestations; (3) Exploring mitigation paths.

China and outside China research shows that university teachers face multiple professional pressures, which stem not only from the nature of the work itself, but also from the external social environment and personal factors. Factors influencing occupational stress include monotonous and unchallenging work, student behavior, role conflict, interpersonal relationships, promotion pressure, and work-family conflict. In order to effectively alleviate the occupational stress of university teachers, it is necessary to start from the three levels of society, school and individual, and take comprehensive intervention measures to improve organizational support, optimize the working environment, and enhance teachers' professional identity and work performance, so as to promote teachers' mental health and professional development.

In this study, occupational stress is defined as a state of physical and mental tension experienced by individuals in the course of their work due to factors such as a mismatch between job requirements and their own abilities, resources, or expectations. In the profession of university teachers, occupational stress is specifically manifested as the psychological burden felt by teachers when facing teaching, research, student management and other work tasks.

2.2 Literature Review

Young teachers in universities, as the core force driving the development of higher education, have faced significant professional pressure issues, which have become a key factor restricting the development of teachers and the improvement of educational quality. Academic circles both at home and abroad have produced rich research results on this topic. This part will systematically review the existing research from three dimensions: the sources of professional pressure, its impact effects, and coping strategies. Based on the core issue of "the formation mechanism of professional pressure among young teachers in Beijing, China universities" of this study, it will clarify the existing research gaps and lay the foundation for subsequent grounded theory analysis.

2.2.1 Literature Review

China research generally holds that institutional constraints are the main source of pressure.Young university teachers face multiple pressures in their professional development, mainly from the high requirements of scientific research assessment and title promotion. Zhou and Xing pointed out that scientific research assessment and title evaluation have become the biggest source of pressure for young university teachers [3]. Tian and Jiang also found [4] that under the "non-promotion, non-retention" policy, young university teachers face huge professional anxiety, and the main sources of pressure include academic publication, title promotion, peer competition, curriculum teaching and environmental adaptation, among which academic publication and title promotion are the most important influencing factors. Andthe dual pressure of teaching and research is also an important challenge faced by young teachers [5]. Ding and Shen pointed out that universities do not pay enough attention to teaching in teacher employment and promotion, the teaching-oriented atmosphere is low, and teachers' teaching autonomy is not high. This phenomenon of "emphasizing scientific research and neglecting teaching" makes it difficult for young teachers to balance between teaching and scientific research, increasing professional pressure [6].The research by Tian et al., from a personal orientation perspective, found that the occupational stress of Chinese university teachers can be classified into six different types. Among them, "task-related stress type" teachers have significantly higher levels of job burnout compared to "interpersonal stress type" teachers [7].

These occupational stressesalsohave had a significant impact, mainly manifested as occupational anxiety, work stress, health anxiety and a sense of status deprivation. Nie et al. found that young university teachers are prone to work stress in the case of a poor scientific research environment. The lack of policy environment, team support and welfare security leads to young teachers feeling stressed and lacking motivation at work, which in turn affects their mental health [8]. This high sense of pressure leads to occupational anxiety and mental health problems.

In order to cope with these pressures, universities and governments should take a variety of measures [9]. Scholarssuggest that universities should change their governance philosophy, attach importance to participatory governance, and increase pressure relief, such as Ding Yunhua and Shen Hong [5] proposed that the government should establish and improve the university classification evaluation system, and universities should continue to improve and optimize the title evaluation and employment system, and actively create an environment conducive to the teaching development of young teachers. Li and Fu also pointed out that universities should pay attention to the pre-education and practical training of the mentor role preparation period, attach importance to the personalized guidance and support of the mentor role exploration period, and strengthen the policy incentives and system guarantees of the mentor role development period [10].

In summary, young university teachers face multiple pressures in their professional development, which not only affect their work performance, but also have a significant impact on their mental health.

2.2.2 Foreign Research Status

Foreign research emphasizes that organizational management, institutional constraints, and role overload are the core sources of career stress for university teachers. DeMatthews et al. found through research that the workload, working hours, school operating hours, school and staff size, and the unique challenges of working with young people are the main factors leading to occupational stress [11]. In addition, Oplatka pointed out [12] that the lack of autonomy of university teachers and the control of regional regulatory agencies are also sources of stress.Strict regulations covering teaching methods, curriculum content and even teacher performance evaluation inhibit teachers' professional freedom and increase their workload. Hitt andTucker [13], Khalifa, Gooden, andDavis emphasized the key role of university teachers in improving teaching quality, implementing culturally responsive teaching practices, and collaborating with families, communities, regional administrators, and other partners. The expectations and responsibilities of these roles invisibly increase teachers' work stress [14].

Research conducted abroad has shown that high levels of stress can affect one's job satisfaction and work stability. The research by Woods et al. found that there is actually a significant negative correlation between stress and job satisfaction. However, if teachers possess good coping skills, they can effectively regulate this negative relationship [15]. Ji showed that occupational stress in university teachers not only affects their physical and mental health, but may also lead to decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover intention [16]. Brady et al. pointed out that both the quality and quantity of work stress are important factors in predicting burnout, and the work-related coherence of teachers plays a

significant role in buffering the impact of stress. This psychological resource enables teachers to maintain a relatively stable state when facing high-pressure environments [17]. The research by Maqsood et al. indicates that university teachers generally experience significant occupational stress, and their perception of stress and coping strategies vary depending on gender, marital status, and the public-private nature of the institution they work for [18].

In terms of strategies for dealing with occupational stress, foreign research places greater emphasis on jointly intervening by enhancing individual psychological resources and optimizing organizational environments. Woods et al. [14] pointed out that the coping ability of teachers can significantly moderate the negative impact of stress on job satisfaction, and improving individual coping skills is regarded as a crucial protective factor. Brady et al. [16] particularly emphasized the importance of "work-related coherence" as a psychological resource. They believe that this coherence not only directly reduces burnout levels but also effectively buffers the adverse impact of the quality of work stress. In addition to individual psychological development, active intervention at the organizational level is also indispensable. Ansley et al. found that implementing online stress intervention programs based on cognitive-behavioral theory [19], such as through modular mindfulness training and cognitive restructuring, can significantly increase the frequency of teachers' use of coping strategies in a short period and effectively alleviate emotional exhaustion. The empirical research by Jennings et al. also confirmed that projects like "CARE" (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education), which aim to enhance awareness and resilience, can fundamentally reduce teachers' psychological distress and enhance their emotional regulation abilities [20]. Ghasemi based on the social ecology framework, integrated the research conducted over the past two decades, and constructed the "mental health integration model". This study emphasizes that stress and job burnout are the most challenging and widespread psychological problems among the teaching population, and points out that effective intervention must adopt a comprehensive and preventive approach, taking into account the complex interactions of internal and external factors in the educational context. This provides an important theoretical framework for understanding and intervening in the mental health issues of teachers at the system level [21].

Although existing studies have identified key stressors, they lack exploration of the dynamic interaction mechanism of individual, organizational and environmental multi-factors, and lack localized analysis combined with specific regional institutional environments, making it difficult to fully explain the complex logic of stress generation.

2.3 Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design. Through literature review, it identifies and summarizes the main characteristics and sources of occupational stress among young college teachers, and clarifies the research framework. An interview questionnaire based on grounded theory is designed to conduct in-depth interviews on the causes, manifestations, and internal mechanisms of occupational stress among young teachers, and to explore their complex relationships [22].

2.3.1 Participants and Sampling

The study adopts a theoretical sampling method adapted to grounded theory, and selects 12 young college teachers in the Beijing, China area as research subjects. Sampling takes "information saturation and mechanism mining depth" as the core goal, taking into account different disciplinary backgrounds to ensure that the sample can fully cover the diverse scenarios and subjective experiences of stress generation, and provide rich empirical material for core category extraction and theoretical model construction. The basic information of the sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary table of basic information of interviews with young college teachers.

Subject Category	Your Gender	Professional title	Education Level	Type of Employment	Age	School age	Number of children
Management	Female	Lecturer	Doctoral student	Employed with career status	29	2 years and below	0
Management	Female	Research intern	Master's student	Employed with career status	35	2-5 years	1
Management	Female	Research intern	Master's student	Labor dispatch	30	6-10 years	1
Science	Male	Lecturer	Master's student	Employed with career status	45	10 years and above	2
Management	Male	Professor	Doctoral student	Employed with career status	45	10 years and above	1
History	Female	Research intern	Master's student	Employed with career status	27	2 years and below	0
Economics	Female	Lecturer	Master's student	Employed with career status	38	10 years and above	2
Literature	Female	Lecturer	Doctoral student	Employed with career status	37	2-5 years	1
Engineering	Male	Lecturer	Doctoral student	Tenure-track system	39	2 years and below	1
Engineering	Female	Lecturer	Doctoral student	Employed with career status	37	2-5 years	1
Psychology	Male	Lecturer	Doctoral student	Tenure-track Lecturer	38	2 years and below	1
Management	Female	Teaching Assistant	Master's student	Contract system	30	2-5 years	0

2.3.2 Data Collectionand Analysis

The data was mainly collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview outline covered aspects such as career choice motivation, work experience, sources of stress, impact of stress, and coping strategies. The interview time for each interviewee was approximately 60-90 minutes. A total of 12 valid interview materials were obtained, forming a text database of approximately 140,000 words for subsequent analysis. The data analysis strictly followed the three-level coding procedure of grounded theory [23]: 31 initial concepts related to occupational stress were extracted from the text through open coding, and clustered and summarized into 11 general categories through axial coding and clarified logical relationships. Finally, the three core categories of "individual - organization - environment" were refined through selective coding to construct a theoretical model of occupational stress for young college teachers.

2.3.3 Research Framework and Design

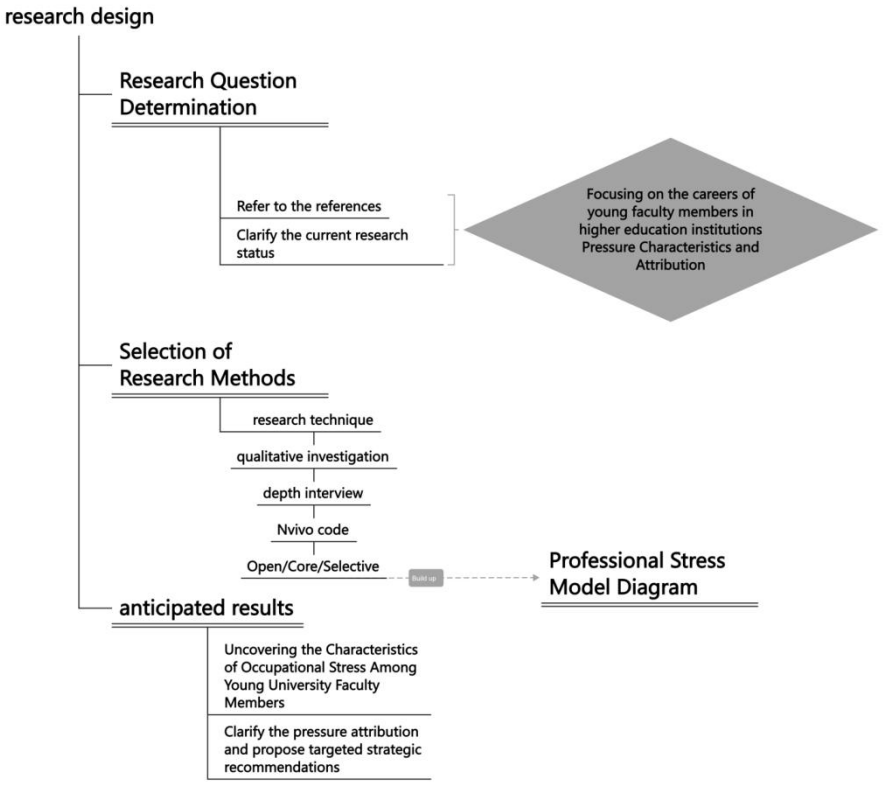

Figure 1. Framework idea diagram.

The overall research design of this study is presented in Figure 1, which consists of three sequential phases: research problem identification, research method selection, and expected outcomes.

The first phase focuses on defining the research problem. Through literature retrieval and systematic review, the current status of research on occupational stress among young university teachers is clarified, and the core research question—focusing on the characteristics and attribution of occupational stress among this group—is refined, laying a clear direction for the subsequent research.

The second phase involves the selection and implementation of research methods. This study adopts a qualitative research approach, collecting primary data through in-depth interviews. Using qualitative analysis software (NVivo), the collected data is processed through three stages of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, ultimately leading to the construction of the occupational stress model diagram for young university teachers.

The third phase outlines the expected outcomes of the study. Specifically, this research aims to reveal the characteristics of occupational stress among young university teachers, clarify the attribution and underlying mechanisms of such stress, and propose targeted strategic recommendations for stress mitigation.

3. Coding Analysis and Theoretical Model Construction

This study employed NVivo12 software, using an open, associative, and core-based three-stage Nvivo coding

method to analyze the occupational stress characteristics and influencing mechanisms of the survey subjects. After importing 12 valid data into the software, open coding extracted 31 initial codes and classified them into 11 categories. Then, through core-based coding, three core categories of individual, environmental, and organizational factors were identified, laying the foundation for subsequent theoretical construction and in-depth analysis.

3.1 Open Coding

In the open coding stage, researchers need to set aside their individual "inclinations" or "preconceptions" to ensure the originality of the material. Through in-depth analysis of 12 interview data, the researchers extracted multiple "local concepts" from the original data and formed initial codes. These initial codes reflect the specific manifestations and feelings of young college teachers in occupational stress. For example: Heavy teaching tasks: Young teachers generally report that the preparation time is long, the number of class hours is large, and the teaching tasks occupy a lot of time, and the teaching assessment system is not in line with the actual situation; Research assessment pressure: The rigid indicators of research assessment (such as CSSCI paper publication requirements, strong research timeliness, and difficulty in publishing research papers) make young teachers face greater research pressure; Pressure for professional title promotion: The irrationality of the professional title evaluation system, the scarcity of promotion quotas, and the high requirements for representative work evaluation lead to young teachers feeling anxious about professional title promotion. Difficulty in balancing work and life: Young teachers find it difficult to balance work and family responsibilities, especially dual-income families have greater pressure on children's education and family affairs. Insufficient organizational support: The school's support policies for young teachers (such as scientific research resources, teaching support, career path planning, etc.) are insufficient, which makes young teachers feel isolated and helpless in their career development. Through further induction of these initial concept categories, the researchers formed 31 first-level codes (see Table 2), which cover many aspects of occupational stress among young college teachers.

Table 2. Open coding (excerpt).

Original statement excerpt	**Initial concept category**
"Yes, I'm very confused again. The pressure is very high. I remember that it was also a Monday class. Every weekend I was very anxious. Every weekend I was anxious because I had to go to class on Monday. Because I remember that the class was also at 8 am. After 8 am, I had to send my child. Sending the child back, I was in a hurry. Every time you had that semester, every weekend I was anxious, every time."	Long preparation time
"But the pressure of teaching is very long and very high. It's also a very daily kind of pressure."	
"Teaching is not easy either. 12 classes a week, it takes 20 hours to prepare, sometimes I'm still preparing at 2 am."	
“Students attend classes like "clocking in for work," with high attendance rates but low participation.”	Poor student feedback and classroom atmosphere issues
“But everyone feels very dull and uninterested, and I think this feeling is a big reason why the class is so difficult to teach.”	
“In addition, in terms of teaching, I often feel inadequate. I want to teach this to the children, but it always feels like a one-man show. They all have their own ideas and are not willing to listen.”	
“During graduate school, a certain research method was not a focus of training; after graduation, this field suddenly became a research hotspot. In the early days of employment, heavy teaching tasks occupied the main energy, and later, due to family responsibilities and the pressure of pursuing a doctorate, I was never able to systematically make up for the shortcomings of this research method. Now, research involving this tool is difficult to advance, research output is limited, and promotion is hindered. Trying to switch to teaching work, but it is difficult to completely let go of academic pursuits, and when returning to research, I feel the double pressure brought by the ability gap, which has become a difficult bottleneck in career development.”	Insufficient research level
“I think the most difficult part for me is research”	
“If you follow the original 35, I think it's research pressure, it's competitive, but for me, besides this competition, (research) it becomes more difficult to solve.”	
“Then every time you do it, it's so difficult for you to get materials, because it's something you're not good at, and the procedure is complicated. Because you're not good at it, you often do it, and every time you do it, you still get beaten back, forgetting a lot of the hard conditions for what you should do? Actually, you don't want to put energy into it. But it must be done right, so you can't do it. And then it's not very frequent. And then it's put there, but it's very annoying when you do it.”	Administrative teaching role conflict
“You still have children, you have a family, and you need to take care of them. It's not like, hey, I have nothing now, so I'll just do this. Yeah, that's a big problem.”	Work-life balance
“Sometimes it feels like I'm 'rushing from place to place,' with my time fragmented, making it difficult to calm down and delve deeply into a specific area.”	
“Then there's definitely no clear boundary between your personal life and work.”	

“I think for me personally, my personal requirements or something, that accounts for more, at least 60%, which is my own personality and the perspective on work.”	Personal characteristics (prone to anxiety, overthinking)
“I consider myself a perfectionist, but now this personality has become a burden.”	
“I think it's more personal. Because I am prone to anxiety, I tend to think about many outcomes.”	
“Personal factors certainly play a role, like how I always want to come up with a 'sensational' topic.”	Pursuit of high-quality topics, “forced involution” (being compelled to compete intensely)
“It's like seeing peers, people at your level, publishing top journals, and I'll be up late at night, trying to come up with a good topic.”	
“If you feel you have no passion in this position, then going to a new track will bring new pressure.”	Weakening of professional identity
“The effect on the second day is not good, and emotionally I feel down, feeling that the sense of value is low. It's quite frustrating, the sense of value is low, and the evaluation of oneself is also more negative.”	
“It's very strange, the status is very low now. The lower it is, the less students recognize you, so how can you impart your various methods? The various methods are your ideas, and they treat you as a waiter. Do you really expect a student to listen to the ideas that he thinks are from a low-end or non-high-end person that he wants to instill?”	
“The turnover housing in a certain school is only open to those with established positions, and pre-appointed teachers can only watch enviously.”	Demands for life security
“It's like other universities may have their own affiliated middle schools, so there's no need to talk about those. Then, like the Beijing, China Municipal Education Commission, it must be at least the top-tier universities in this district, so if we can, we can talk to them. It's best to be top-tier, top-tier may be category A or category B, but it's best to be in the top-tier.”	
“It would be even better if the education of children could be resolved.”	
“So in the system, everyone can be treated when they get sick, which is fine, but, well, it would be even better if the school could have secondary reimbursement. That is, for those not covered by public medical care, or for some that are not within the scope of public medical care, depending on the condition of the illness. Because some government departments have secondary reimbursement, that is, for those that don't have it, and then a proportional reimbursement is made.”	
“Especially from the perspective of family structure, there are still differences in the responsibilities undertaken by boys and girls. Although we talk about feminism and gender equality today, the reality is different. Yes, the main responsibility for supporting the family is still mainly borne by men. Although everyone owns half of the property when buying a house, right? But the man has to pay the mortgage. Well, including my wife, because she takes care of the children and doesn't go to work, the school's treatment is very low.”	Contradictions between economic and family division of labor (such as “dual-income family pressure”)
"But the current social development model, especially from the perspective of family structure, still has different responsibilities for boys and girls. Although we talk about feminism and gender equality today, the reality is different. Yes, the primary responsibility for supporting the family still falls mainly on men. My wife also stays home to take care of the children, and the school's benefits are very low."	
"And then the real pressure comes from economic pressure, because his salary level is not high. And you have to take out a loan, and then you have to support your child to study for a doctorate abroad. And then it's just one person in the family bearing it. Because my wife's income is unstable, and then there's this economic pressure."	
"And then the father is more of a bearer of economic pressure. If the house is distributed this time, it might be better, and the pressure on housing can be reduced a bit, otherwise the income at our school is low."	
"I've been working as the director of the office for the past few years, all kinds of assessments, all kinds of reports, just those things, just a little tedious."	Administrative burden
"The difficult part is because my main job is teaching secretary, so there will definitely be some coordination difficulties in terms of time (with classes), because I am in charge of the students' graduation thesis, and the workload is very large."	
"During the graduation season, his workload may be a bit saturated, and there is a problem with time allocation."	
"But what's more annoying is actually administration. Yes, it's very annoying. Every time you do it, you're like, oh, it's so hard, the materials, because it's something you're not good at, and the procedures are complicated."	
"And then all kinds of approval procedures are still complex in terms of procedures? The complexity of the procedures themselves is that he wants to control it, he thinks he wants to grasp this initiative, right? But some courses, for example, I teach xx, for example, I teach xx course, maybe the training I participate in is a positive skill training. I'm not necessarily xx, so do you agree or disagree? Isn't it? I'm very curious, some people are talking about healing, I'm listening to how this is being taught? In yoga class, I think it might also help with the conditions of this xx, I want to sign up for a yoga training class, I'm a little crazy. Right? This kind of knowledge is indeed not much, so you can only be that kind of very formal and very serious."	Rigid management mechanism
"The general direction is enough to control, and the small details should still be left to the teacher."	
"In terms of teaching workload, if you're talking about pressure, it's a different kind of pressure, like when we were in charge of the teaching and research section in the early days. There were few people and many majors, meaning there were always so many classes, but only a few people in the teaching and research section, so the teachers had to teach frequently."	

3.2 Axial Coding

By comparing the 31 initial conceptual categories of open coding, 11 main categories are formed, namely teaching ability pressure, scientific research ability pressure, role conflict and adaptability pressure, time and task management pressure, psychological traits and self-requirements, social expectations and evaluation, family and life pressure, cultural value conflict, institutional design defects, resource allocation and management, and support system defects, thereby clarifying the core categories of occupational stress of young college teachers, and then determining the influencing factor indicators and elements of occupational stress of young college teachers.

Table 3. Axial coding.

Category	**Number of reference points**	**Main category**	
Teaching ability pressure	20	Personal factors	147
Research ability pressure	25		
Role conflict and adaptability pressure	38		
Time and task management pressure	30		
Psychological traits and self-demands	34		
Social expectations and evaluation	15	Environment	45
Family and life stress	27		
Cultural values conflict	3		
Institutional design flaws	83	Organization	160
Resource allocation and management	40		
Support system defects	37		

3.3 Selective Coding and Model Building

Table 4. Coding table of occupational stress for young teachers in universities in Beijing, China.

Initial concept category	**Frequency**	**Axial Coding**	**Selective Coding**
Long preparation time	4	Teaching Ability Stress 23	Personal factors
Mismatch between teaching objectives and student status (poor classroom effect)	9		
Poor student feedback and classroom atmosphere issues	3		
Many teaching hours and low evaluation weight	3		
Teaching work becomes daily stress	3		
Insufficient research level	5	Research Ability Stress 30	
Research assessment pressure	7		
Pressure to publish research (publication timeliness)	18		
Administrative teaching role conflict	18	Role conflict and adaptability pressure 38	
Ambiguous boundaries of responsibility	9		
Family responsibilities and research dilemmas	21		
Work overload	13		
Economic pressure	3		
Work-life balance	13		
Personal characteristics (prone to anxiety, overthinking)	3	Psychological traits and self-demands 35	
High self-demands for teaching	7		
Pursuit of high-quality topics, “forced involution” (being compelled to compete intensely)	3		
Weakening of professional identity	21		
		Social expectations and evaluation 15	Environment
Family responsibility conflict	10	Family and Life Stress 27	
Demands for life security	19		
Contradictions between economic and family division of labor (such as “dual-income family pressure”)	3		
The Gap Between the Ideal and Reality of “Teaching and Educating People” for University Teachers	3	Cultural Value Conflict 3	

Contradictions in the Assessment System	67	Defects in System Design 49	Organization
Defects in the Promotion System	52		
Policy Implementation Conflicts	27		
Unfair Allocation of Resources	17	Resource Allocation and Management 40	
Administrative burden	15		
Rigid management mechanism	8		
Insufficient Welfare and Security	27	Support system defect 36	
Lack of training and guidance	9		

In the selective coding stage, through in-depth analysis of 31 initial concept categories and 11 main categories, the core category of "Formation Mechanism of Occupational Stress of Young College Teachers" was finally extracted, and an occupational stress influencing factor model was constructed, namely the "Individual Characteristics - Organizational System - Environmental Interaction" stress action model (see Figure 2 for the model structure). Among them, "Psychological Characteristics and Self-Requirements" are included in the individual characteristics dimension because the teacher's personal character, teaching self-expectations, and other internal characteristics directly affect their perception and response to stress, such as an easily anxious personality and an "involution" mentality of excessively pursuing high topics, which will intensify the stress experience from the individual level. The "Support System Defect" is placed in the organizational system dimension because organizational-level system design issues such as the lack of training guidance and insufficient welfare guarantees in colleges and universities are external triggers of teachers' occupational stress, which are directly related to the impact of organizational management on teachers' stress. Regarding the dimensional attribution of "Social Expectations and Evaluation," it was found in the interviews that although society's high expectations for the teaching profession belong to external environmental factors, they will affect teachers' self-cognition and react on individual stress perception. For example, teachers may develop self-doubt due to the difficulty in meeting social expectations. This interaction between the environment and the individual makes "Social Expectations and Evaluation" more suitable as the core element of the environmental interaction dimension, highlighting the indirect role of environmental factors on teachers' occupational stress. Through this coding logic, the formation mechanism of occupational stress of young college teachers in multiple dimensions of individual, organization, and environment is clearly presented.

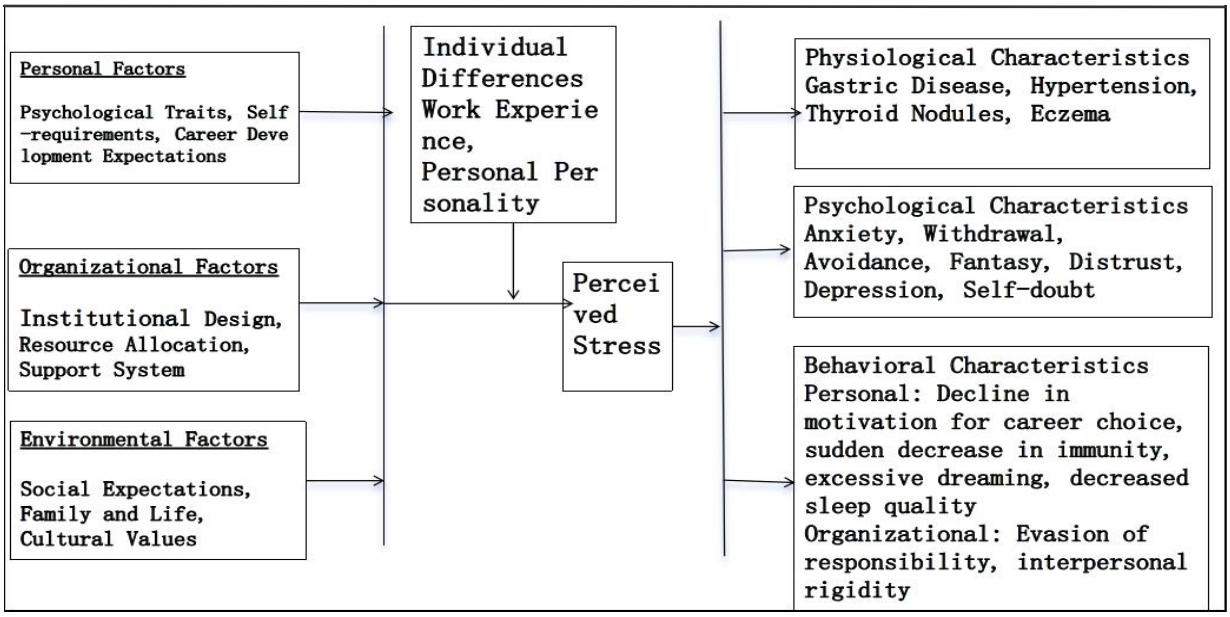

Figure 2. Occupational stress model diagram.

Figure 2 systematically presents the dynamic relationship of occupational stress of young college teachers: personal factors (psychological characteristics, self-requirements, career development expectations), organizational factors (system design, resource allocation, support system), and environmental factors (social expectations, family and life, cultural values) serve as sources of stress, and the individual differences (work experience, personal character, perceived situation) mediate the teacher's perception of stress [24]. Ultimately, stress is specifically manifested in three characteristics: at the physiological level, it manifests as physical ailments such as stomach problems, high blood pressure, and thyroid nodules; at the psychological level, it presents negative psychological states such as anxiety, self-doubt, and depression; at the behavioral level, the individual dimension is reflected in the decline of career choice motivation and the decline in sleep quality, while the organizational dimension is reflected in avoidance of responsibility and interpersonal stiffness. This dynamic relationship chain of "stress source - individual perception mediation - stress manifestation" completely reveals the internal mechanism of occupational stress of young college teachers from generation to action.

3.4 Comparison of Models

This study compared the theoretical model constructed by us with the widely recognized classic occupational stress models outside China

Firstly, compared with the classic teacher occupational stress theory model proposed by Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, such as Figure 3 both revealed that stress is the result of the interaction between the individual and the environment, rather than a simple stimulus-response. However, this study placed more emphasis on the exploration and analysis of the interaction of local contextual traits. Secondly, in the path of stress impact, the "job demands - resources model" (JD-R model) proposed by Demerouti et al.was introduced ,such as Figure 4.

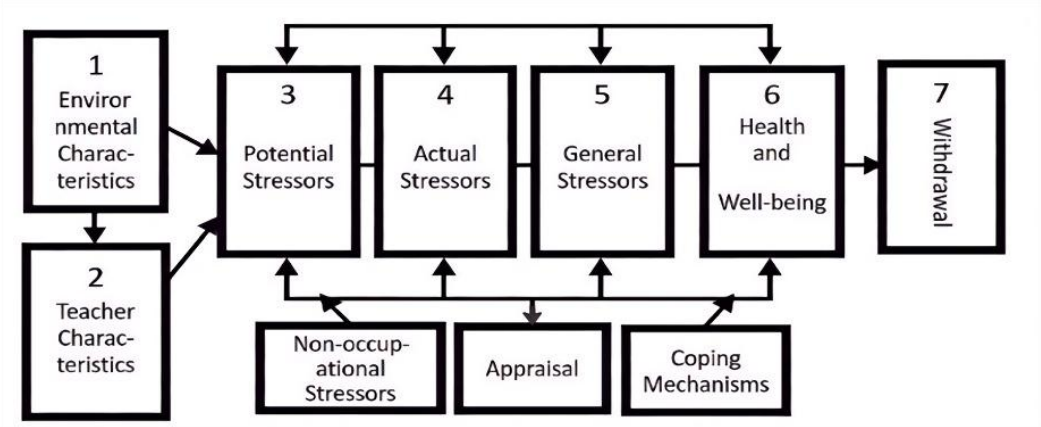

Figure 3. Sutcliffe and Kyriacou's theoretical model of teacher occupational stress.

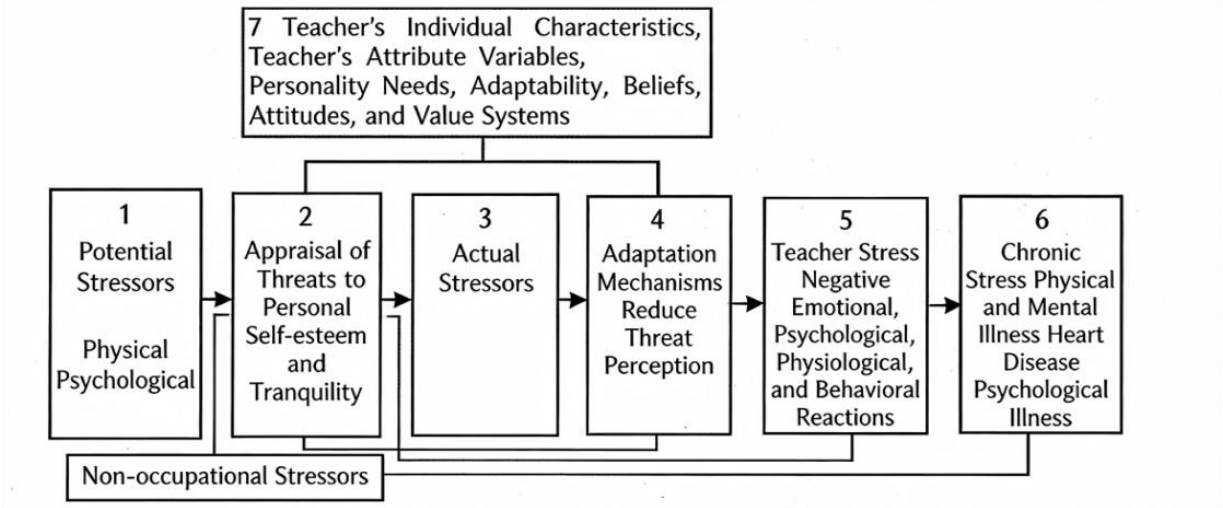

Figure 4. Brenner's theoretical model of teacher work stress.

The JD-R model holds that excessive job demands will lead to health losses, which in turn cause job burnout. This study's stress transmission model further confirms this point. However, the difference is that the JD-R model mainly provides a macro-level explanatory framework, while this study further reveals the specific evolution of this "job demands" in Chinese universities - it manifests as a systemic survival anxiety rather than simply excessive workload.

Kyriacou andSutcliffe's classic Teacher Stress Model (Figure 4) clearly illustrates the complete pathway of teacher occupational stress from potential stimuli to eventual health outcomes, while also highlighting the key moderating role of individual characteristics. Similarly, the present study also demonstrates that different individuals experience different outcomes when facing stress through their personal perceptions, revealing certain parallels with the model.

In terms of model architecture, the theoretical framework constructed by this study formed a good correspondence with the university teacher work stress model proposed by Zeng Xiaojuan. Both followed the logical chain of "stressor - mediating mechanism - outcome variable", which confirmed that there is indeed a universal internal law in the generation process of teacher occupational stress. However, the focus of this study was not on repeating the verification of this structure, but on refinement based on the local context. Compared with the broad definition of stressors in the classic model, this study more specifically anchored the institutional characteristics.

This discovery based on the local context not only verified the universality of the classic theory but also expanded its explanatory boundaries.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Research Conclusions

This study is based on the "individual-environment-organization" three-dimensional model of occupational stress, combined with qualitative coding analysis, to reveal the core sources of occupational stress among young teachers in Beijing, China universities and their interaction mechanisms. The study found that occupational stress is not driven by a single factor, but is the result of the joint action of personal traits, social environment, and organizational systems. Moreover, these three elements form a "stress spiral" through dynamic interaction, further exacerbating the psychological and occupational burden of teachers.

From the individual perspective, young teachers generally face the predicament of "imbalance between ability and expectation". On one hand, the contradiction between high self-demand (such as strict teaching standards and pursuit of cutting-edge research topics) and their own ability limitations (such as insufficient research skills and inefficient time management) directly triggers anxiety; on the other hand, weakened professional identity is significantly related to job burnout, reflecting the continuous depletion of psychological resources under long-term high pressure.

The pressure from the environmental dimension is manifested as the double squeeze of social expectations and family responsibilities. The "all-round" expectations for teachers' roles continue to increase. On one hand, social expectations have expanded from the traditional "teaching and nurturing students" to student management (such as psychological counseling, life guidance), administrative responses, and even the "moral role model" role in public opinion. This "all-round teacher" expectation leads teachers to be "overloaded with roles". Most interviewees stated that "the requirements of society for teachers have exceeded the professional boundaries". They also extended the responsibility for student management infinitely, which led to role overload and job burnout, further amplifying the fatigue of teachers.

The institutional defect in the organizational dimension is the core hub of stress transmission. The study found that rigid assessment systems (such as the "non-promotion or transfer" policy and hard research indicators) and unfair resource allocation (such as preferential allocation of research funds and lack of welfare guarantees) constitute the main contradiction. In addition, excessive administrative workload occupied the core working time of teachers.

4.2 Practical Suggestions

Based on these findings, this study proposes an optimization path for policies.

4.2.1 Individual Level

To address issues such as the decline of individual career identity, a regular "Career Value Reconstruction" training program has been established [25]. Through the display of teaching achievements and sharing of social service cases, it helps teachers build diversified perceptions of success and weakens the self-critical tendency of "only focusing on research". A "Teacher Mental Health Management Platform" has been developed, integrating self-assessment of anxiety, online psychological counseling, and stress relief courses (such as mindfulness meditation, time management training), providing immediate psychological support..

Match "academic mentors" for teachers with weak research capabilities, providing targeted guidance on thesis writing and project application; at the same time, addressing issues such as "formalization of the master-apprentice system" and "poor training effectiveness" in qualitative coding, a "reward - assessment - output" closed-loop mechanism is constructed: (1) Two-way binding incentives: The mentor's guidance achievements will be included as a "social service" bonus item in the professional title evaluation, and the trainees' participation will be directly linked to promotion, eliminating "perfunctory guidance"; (2) Process quantification control: The master and apprentice sign the "Capacity Enhancement Task Book", clearly defining the phased goals and communication requirements; (3) Third-party effectiveness assessment: Every quarter, the academic committee conducts blind reviews of the trainees' achievements, and if the standards are not met, the master-apprentice group will activate the "replacement mechanism" to ensure "real teaching and real learning"; (4) Establish "teaching innovation workshops" to help teachers optimize course design and reduce self-doubt caused by "poor classroom effectiveness" [26].

Regarding the issues of multiple roles and role adaptation in the embedded coding process, further standardized the job descriptions. (1) Clearly defined the job responsibilities, and transferred non-core tasks to full-time administrative staff; (2) Distributed tasks based on abilities, and provided targeted training according to teachers' strengths and weaknesses [27].

4.2.2 Organizational Level

Regarding the issues of assessment pressure and rigid systems that arise at the organizational level, the following measures can be taken: (1) Optimize the pre-hire assessment mechanism, design flexible assessment cycles, distinguish between "teaching-oriented", "research-oriented", and "social service-oriented" positions, and formulate differentiated core indicators [28]; (2) Implement the representative work review system, replace quantity with quality, and allow

teachers to substitute high-level achievements for short-term paper accumulation to alleviate the "review cycle contradiction" pressure.

Regarding resource and welfare-related issues: (1) Establish a public display platform to disclose details of funding, equipment, and academic quota allocation, ensuring fair resource distribution; (2) Link housing subsidies, medical reimbursement ratios to working years and increase them year by year, integrate the medical reimbursement process, and alleviate economic pressure.

Regarding administrative burden reduction and process simplification requirements: (1) Implement the "online full-process system" to integrate the submission processes of reimbursement, project application, assessment materials, etc. [29]; (2) Transfer unnecessary matters to administrative staff.

4.2.3 Environmental Level

For issues related to social expectations, promote the addition of "teaching innovation" and "social service" indicators in the professional title evaluation [30] , reduce the weight of the number of papers, recognize outstanding contributions of teachers in non-research fields, reshape society's diverse perception of the teaching profession, and alleviate the problem of "weakening professional identity".

4.3 Innovation and Shortcomings

The innovation and contribution of this study focus on three aspects: First, the scenario-targeted innovation focuses on young teachers in Beijing, China universities, combined with the characteristics of concentrated higher education resources and rigid policy implementation in the capital, and deeply explores localized pressure sources such as administrative burden and generalization of social expectations, making up for the research gap in specific regional pressure mechanisms; Second, the research method is purely qualitative and deepened, relying on grounded theory to complete the entire process of three-level coding, and capturing the interactive logic of pressure generation through 12 in-depth interviews, breaking through the superficial limitations of quantitative research; Third, the research framework is integrated and innovative, constructing a three-dimensional interactive model of “individual-environment-organization”, revealing the “pressure spiral” mechanism of the dynamic cycle of the three, providing localized empirical support for the multi-dimensional integration of occupational stress theory.

This study has certain limitations: the validity and reliability of qualitative coding are not guaranteed by triangulation verification, and there may be subjective bias in the extraction of core paradigms; the sample is unevenly distributed in terms of gender, professional title, and career stage, and the representativeness is limited; only cross-sectional data is used, lacking dynamic tracking; the countermeasures and suggestions have not been verified by on-site pilot projects. Future research can introduce a third-party coding team, supplement interview samples, expand the sample size and distribute it evenly, include universities outside Beijing, China, and adopt a combination of longitudinal tracking and small-scale pilot projects to improve the rigor of the research and the universality of the conclusions, and explore the dynamic evolution mechanism of pressure and the effectiveness of countermeasures.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Generative AI Statement

The authors declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

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