

# A Study on the Current Situation of Mental Health and Maintenance Strategies of Early Childhood Teachers

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## Abstract:

In order to promote the scientific development of education in China, the quality of the early childhood teacher team is continuously improved, and the pressure on early childhood teachers is increasing. The study aims to understand the current situation of mental health of early childhood teachers, explore the main factors of mental health problems of early childhood teachers, and propose maintenance strategies. The study selected kindergarten teachers from five kindergartens and investigated three dimensions of external stress perception, emotion, and professional identity. The data and interview results indicate that current early childhood teachers generally suffer from high work pressure, low salary levels, high stress brought about by over-emphasis from society and parents, and few deescalation strategies that can be applied, leading to the prevalence of certain emotional problems. It is recommended that the education administration should establish a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the mental health of kindergarten teachers, promote the construction of psychosocial service teams towards the basic education group, and create a favourable psychological atmosphere for kindergarten teachers, who should also actively carry out self-regulation in order to have a favourable psychological environment.

## Keywords:

Early Childhood Teachers, Mental Health, Mental Health Maintenance

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## 1. Introduction

Mental health problems among early childhood teachers have become a widespread phenomenon in society. In their daily work, early childhood teachers need to make constant adjustments to their own behaviours and emotions in order to adapt to the needs of young children, consuming a large amount of personal psychological resources, and this kind of highly emotionally invested work often puts them under a lot of pressure. In addition, early childhood teachers are also under pressure from society, parents and early childhood education. Among teachers of all types of school segments, the lower economic treatment and long working hours all affect the psychological health of early childhood teachers and trigger their negative

psychological emotions. When a kindergarten teacher undertakes the task of care and education at the same time the psychological is also in an unhealthy state for a long time, it will be harmful to their own physical and mental health, resulting in a loss of control over their behaviour, in the work of the work is very easy to lose enthusiasm, and it is difficult to reflect the due moral cultivation of the teacher, and in the long term will be the phenomenon of occupational burnout, which directly reduces the positive impact of the positive attachment between the young children.

The literature on the impact of preschool teachers' mental health usually focuses on the macro aspects, the economic level of the industry, the impact of policies, and the nature of kindergartens; the intermediary aspects of teacher-student interaction, teacher's family, communication with parents, etc. But the micro level of personal factors, such as self-compassion and social emotions, as well as coping strategies. It is unlikely to explore the relationship between factors [1,2,3,4,5,6]. The impact and improvement of preschool teachers' mental health should be clear from the three paths of society, kindergarten, and themselves [7]. However, compared with other school teachers, preschool teachers are younger, strengthen communication and cooperation between families and families, and the complexity of other characteristics of work content, so the group mental health influencing factors are what we need to investigate and discuss [8,9].

This study intends to investigate the mental health of kindergarten teachers, to analyse the results of the survey aims to grasp the understanding of the current situation of the mental health of kindergarten teachers, to explore the influence factors of the mental health of kindergarten teachers, to put forward the maintenance strategy, hope that this study can further enrich the data of the mental health of kindergarten teachers, at the same time, to maintain the mental health of kindergarten teachers, to improve the quality of the work of kindergarten teachers, and to protect the good and harmonious environment of preschool education plays an important role. It is hoped that this study can further enrich the data on the mental health of early childhood teachers and at the same time play a positive role in maintaining the mental health of early childhood teachers, improving the quality of their work, and guaranteeing a good and harmonious environment for preschool education.

## **2. Research Tools**

### **Objects and Methods:**

The study takes into account the nature of kindergartens, so the random sampling method was used to investigate from two groups: private kindergartens and public kindergartens, and 150 kindergarten teachers from five kindergartens were selected as the research sample for this survey. Among them, 77 kindergarten teachers in private kindergartens and 43 in public ones. Among them, 68.34% were under 30 years of age, 42.5% had a college degree or less, 47.5% had a bachelor's degree, 10% were graduate students or above, 66.76% had less than 3 years of teaching experience, 16.67% had 3-8 years of teaching experience, and 16.67% had more than 10 years of teaching experience. The questionnaire was adapted from the 'Questionnaire on the Status of Early Childhood Teachers' Mental Health Problems' prepared by Yan Chunfang in 2013. This questionnaire was designed from the three dimensions of early childhood teachers' perception of external pressure, emotion, and professional identity, with a total of 16 questions, and the recovered questionnaires were sorted out, and the valid questionnaires were sorted out and data analysed. At the same time,

according to the purpose and content of the study, we conducted interviews on the current situation of mental health of early childhood teachers, to make up for the problem of small sample size of quantitative analysis to the greatest extent possible, and to help further understand the current situation of mental health problems of early childhood teachers, and to explore the influencing factors of the problem.

### 3. Research Findings

#### 3.1. Mental health status of kindergarten teachers

According to the data in Table 1, the number of kindergarten teachers in a high stress state is 45, accounting for 37.5%. Forty-two, 35.0% of the teachers were emotionally drained from their work, and the number of kindergarten teachers who felt a lack of motivation in their lives was 45, or 37.5%. The number of early childhood teachers with a low level of professional identity was 32, or 26.7 per cent. The number of early childhood teachers with poor concentration was 33, accounting for 27.5 per cent. The number of early childhood teachers with high frequency of temper tantrums is 19, accounting for 15.8%. The overall stress level of early childhood teachers is high and their mental health is poor.

**Table 1.** Mental Health Status of Early Childhood Teachers.

| Variant                                                   | Subgroup               | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Stress level of early childhood teachers                  | The pressure is higher | 30            | 25.0%          |
|                                                           | It's very stressful.   | 15            | 12.5%          |
| Levels of emotional exhaustion throughout the day at work | Often.                 | 19            | 15.8%          |
|                                                           | Always.                | 23            | 19.2%          |
| Do you feel that life lacks motivation                    | yes                    | 45            | 37.5%          |
|                                                           | no                     | 75            | 62.5%          |
| As a kindergarten teacher I see value in my work          | agree                  | 13            | 10.8%          |
|                                                           | General                | 75            | 62.5%          |
|                                                           | Disagree               | 32            | 26.7%          |
| Concentration of attention in daily life                  | Good                   | 24            | 20.0%          |
|                                                           | Average                | 63            | 52.5%          |
|                                                           | Poor                   | 33            | 27.5%          |
| Can't control the frequency of tantrums                   | Often.                 | 13            | 10.8%          |
|                                                           | Always.                | 6             | 5.0%           |

Interview 1:

Researcher: Do you feel stressed at your current job?

Private Early Childhood Teacher A: It's quite stressful, often I'm very broken.

Private Early Childhood Teacher B: It's stressful, especially stressful. From time to time, I want to quit my job, and at times I even want to cry.

Public Early Childhood Teacher A: The pressure is not bad, it is inevitable to encounter pressure at work.

Public Early Childhood Teacher B: The pressure is especially high, just working, the workload is especially heavy and tiring.

Public Early Childhood Teacher C: The pressure is still relatively high.

Interview 2:

Researcher: Are you satisfied with your current life?

Private Early Childhood Teacher A: Dissatisfied, the shift goes from morning to night and I have to work overtime, I can't rest at all.

Private kindergarten teacher B: Very dissatisfied, in the examination of the editorial, now the salary is low, the work is tired.

Private kindergarten teacher: kindergarten welfare is not good, not satisfied at all.

Public kindergarten teacher A: general, a bit numb.

Public kindergarten teacher B: It's not bad, I'm currently in the programme, and I'm still satisfied overall.

### 3.2. Analysis of factors affecting the mental health of early childhood teachers

According to the data in Table 2, the number of kindergarten teachers who think that the education reform has exerted pressure on them is 51, accounting for 42.5 per cent, the number of those who think that communication with parents has exerted pressure is 68, accounting for 56.7 per cent, and the number of those who feel pressure because of salary problems is 34, accounting for 28.3 per cent. Eighty-two (82) of the early childhood teachers showed the attitude of not being optimistic and confused about future development 68.3%. The number of kindergarten teachers who had no correct measures to relieve their bad moods was 80, accounting for 66.7%. Factors affecting the psychological health of early childhood teachers are: increased pressure due to education reform, fewer policies to ensure development, no uniform standards for title evaluation, relatively low social status, communication with parents of young children, no regular psychological training in kindergartens, lack of uniform standards for the management of private kindergartens, the salary level is not proportional to labour, and lack of the ability to relieve their own problems.

**Table 2.** Influences on the mental health of early childhood teachers.

| Variant                        | Subgroup                                      | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Causes of stress               | Education Reform                              | 51            | 42.5%          |
|                                | Communicating with Parents of Young Children  | 68            | 56.7%          |
|                                | Unsatisfactory income                         | 34            | 28.3%          |
| Prospects for self-development | Not optimistic                                | 25            | 20.8%          |
|                                | General                                       | 57            | 47.5%          |
| How to deal with bad feelings  | Taking no action                              | 39            | 32.5%          |
|                                | Bad behaviour such as violence and alcoholism | 2             | 1.7%           |

Interview 3:

Researcher: Do you think there is a difference between public and private kindergartens?

Private kindergarten teacher A: Yes, there is, public salary is high, and there is also establishment paid holidays.

Private Early Childhood Teacher B: Of course there is a difference, public kindergarten teachers are well paid and have an easy job.

Public kindergarten teacher A: Yes, the salary is high and the work is stable.

Public kindergarten teacher B: I think there is a difference, there is an establishment, more stable than private, welfare benefits.

Interview 4:

Researcher: What do you think is the relationship between your salary and your labour?

Private Early Childhood Teacher A: I feel that the salary is lower and not enough to support me to live in this city.

Private Early Childhood Teacher B: I am currently in an internship and my salary is low.

Public Early Childhood Teacher A: The salary is not low.

Public Early Childhood Teacher B: The salary is not proportional to my labour.

Interview 5:

Researcher: Does your kindergarten provide mental health related activities on a regular basis?

Private Early Childhood Teacher A: Yes, about once a month.

Private Early Childhood Teacher B: Never.

Public Early Childhood Teacher A: Yes, but just as a formality.

Public Early Childhood Teacher B: Once, a slide show.

Interview 6:

Researcher: What do you think you can do to effectively relieve work stress?

Private Early Childhood Teacher A: I would confide in my family and friends or cry.

Private Early Childhood Teacher B: I tend to yell at my children when I am stressed, but afterwards I will feel that this is not right and I will feel even worse.

Public Early Childhood Teacher A: I like to tell my friends and family when I am stressed.

Public Early Childhood Teacher B: I can't do anything about the stress, I just have to put up with it, and I get stressed at work.

### ***3.3. Negative impact of mental health problems of early childhood teachers***

According to the data in Table 3, when teachers have psychological problems will affect the work attitude, according to the data show that early childhood teachers appear to spread aggression on the children of the number of 32, accounting for 26.7%, this behaviour is not conducive to the emotional development of young children, young children will be silent, low self-esteem, imitation of violence and other poor development. For the teachers themselves, they are prone to anger and violence, anxiety and insomnia, nausea and headaches, and breathing problems.

***Table 3. Negative impact of mental health problems among early childhood teachers.***

| variant                                       | Subgroup  | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------|----------------|
| Does the work process take it out on the kids | Yes.      | 8             | 6.7%           |
|                                               | Sometimes | 24            | 20.0%          |

| variant         | Subgroup                                 | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Stress reaction | Anxiety, nervousness                     | 64            | 53.3%          |
|                 | Depressed, sad, tearful                  | 48            | 40.0%          |
|                 | Irritable, irritable                     | 55            | 45.8%          |
|                 | Disinterest in things around you         | 46            | 38.3%          |
|                 | Chest tightness and shortness of breath. | 41            | 34.2%          |
|                 | Mental restlessness, memory loss         | 43            | 35.8%          |
|                 | Nausea and vomiting, etc.                | 41            | 34.2%          |
|                 | Dizziness, headache                      | 31            | 25.8%          |
|                 | sleeplessness and excessive dreaming     | 31            | 25.8%          |

#### 4. Conclusion and Prospect

This study investigated early childhood teachers' perception of external pressure, emotions, and professional identity, and found that early childhood teachers are generally in a high-pressure state, with poor overall mental health, and many of them have emotional and somatisation symptoms in a high-pressure environment, and have a low sense of job identity, which affects their work attitude, which may be the main reason why early childhood teachers generally have less than three years of teaching experience. In terms of "dealing with negative emotions", one-third of the kindergarten teachers did not have appropriate ways of dealing with negative emotions, which may be due to a lack of coping strategies. Although this study did not analyse the comparison between private and public kindergartens, through the interviews, we can clearly see that salary, communication with parents, unclear promotion paths, the management style of private kindergartens, and poorer welfare benefits are the main reasons that lead to the comparatively poorer mental health of private kindergarten teachers.

The path to improve the mental health of early childhood teachers is multi-level, for these reasons, with a view to all levels of government departments can pay attention to the guidance of all types of parks mental health education, the teacher level not only to promote mental health knowledge, can provide more types of psychological services resources, regular mental health assessment, homogeneous groups of thematic counselling. To solve the early childhood teacher salary and clear promotion path, improve the title appraisal system of early childhood teachers, to ensure the rights and interests of early childhood teachers. In addition, China's private kindergartens in the number of kindergartens accounted for more than half, but the development of private kindergarten teachers is more limited relative to the public kindergarten teachers, which is also the reason for the high pressure on teachers and high turnover, the higher authorities, if they can give the relevant policy to protect and supervise, the sustained and high-quality development of private education will play a positive role, and the establishment of a good ecospace for early childhood teachers.

#### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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