



Job Burnout and Psychological Empowerment among Police in Mainland China

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Dear Editor-in-Chief

To date, the attitudes of civil servants in China have transformed from taking command and free from media or institutional oversight to being under the scrutiny of the media and receiving inspection from disciplinary inspection and supervision offices, and serving the public. In particular, police officers' job duties include the characteristics of high stress, high-pressure, and high-risk, which are not found in ordinary civil servants. The numbers of Chinese police officers per 10,000 populations are remarkably lower than in other countries: 30.01 in the United States, 34.67 in Britain, 122.46 in Russia, but only 11.00 in mainland China. These show that police force in mainland China has been burdened with a heavy workload (1).

Unfortunately, studies on job burnout in police forces have been rarely reported, even though the symptoms of job burnout have become significant in the police forces. The management of police forces in China follows the top-down principle. Although this management system ensures unified policies and decrees and centralized power, which are conducive to implementing command, the hierarchical top-down management can easily result in lack of enthusiasm and initiative among the subordinates in police force. Thomas and Velthouse indicated that psychological empowerment was an individually experienced psychological status or a cognitive complex, which included four cognitive components: meaning, sense of

competence or self-efficacy, self-determination, and impact (2). However, the research subjects of most empirical studies of psychological empowerment were usually nursing staff and teachers but not police officers (3, 4). Nevertheless, only few empirical studies have been reported in China. Importantly, no report has examined the job burnout from psychological empowerment perspective.

The present study method is cross-sectional-analytical and sampling was conducted among the police force in mainland China, and 363 valid questionnaires were received. We measured burnout using 15-item Chinese edition of Job Burnout Inventory, and psychological empowerment using 12-item Spreitzer Psychological Empowerment (5). Descriptive analysis, univariate analysis to evaluate association with higher score of burnout, and multivariate logistic regression analysis to predict high burnout in psychological empowerment was performed.

Findings showed that 223 persons (61.4% of the 363 valid questionnaires) reported symptoms job burnout, the detection rate of police officers with mild, moderate and severe burnout are 30.9%, 27.3%, and 3.3%. The detection rate of the police officers exhibited emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment are 14.3%, 41.6% and 39.4%. The mean scores for job emotional exhaustion, depersonali-

zation and reduced personal accomplishment were 18.35 ± 7.82 , 11.63 ± 6.17 , and 9.43 ± 5.45 , and the total score of job burnout was 39.41 ± 14.31 . In analysis of variance for the three dimensions of police job burnout based on demographic variables, male police officers had higher depersonalization than female officers; police officers aged 25 years or younger had significantly less emotional exhaustion than in other age groups and Police officers in the age group of 36 – 40 years reported significantly less feeling of reduced personal accomplishment than the other age groups; Among different police categories, SWAT officers had significantly higher emotional exhaustion than other types of police officers, and correctional officers and public security officers had more depersonalization than other types of police officers; among different educational levels, police officers who held a bachelor's degree or above had significantly less depersonalization and feeling of reduced personal accomplishment than police officers with other educational levels. The mean scores for job meaning, self-determination, competency or self-efficacy, and job impact were 11.69 ± 2.35 , 10 ± 2.65 , 11.74 ± 2.23 , and 9.05 ± 2.53 , and the total score of psychological empowerment was 42.48 ± 7.28 . In analysis of variance for the four dimensions of police psychological empowerment based on demographic variables, the police officers in the age groups of 36–40 years and ≥ 41 years were significantly more self-determined than other age groups, Police officers in the age group of ≥ 41 years sensed significantly more job impact than other age groups; correctional officers reported less job meaning and lower competency or self-efficacy than other categories of police officers, board authorities and detectives were significantly more self-determined than other types of police officers; police officers with some college level education reported significantly more job impact than police officers who held a bachelor degree or above.

Results of the multivariate regression analysis showed that significant negative correlations between job burnout and psychological empowerment in Chinese police force members; job mean-

ing was a significant predictor for emotional exhaustion; job meaning and competency or self-efficacy were significant predictors for depersonalization; job meaning, self-determination, and competency or self-efficacy were significant predictors for reduced personal accomplishment and for job burnout. Among job meaning, self-determination, and competence or self-efficacy, job meaning was the most effective predictor for the three symptoms of job burnout.

This study suggested that the degree of job burnout in Chinese police force members might be relieved through improving psychological empowerment. For this reason, we propose the following recommendations for the management of Chinese police forces: Creating a high support and high care working atmosphere, maintaining police force's interest and safety in the system and establishing a social support network in Chinese police forces.

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