



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the Mediating Role of Mindfulness in Factors Affecting Burnout: A Cross-Cultural Study among Counselors in Chinese Universities

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Jul 11, 2024	Burnout among university counselors is a growing concern, particularly in high-stress environments like Chinese universities, where cultural and professional nuances heavily influence job performance. This study addresses the gap in understanding how mindfulness mediates the relationship between specific job stressors—Job Appraisal, Job Required, and Teachers' Professionalism—and burnout among counselors in Zhejiang Province. Utilizing a cross-sectional survey of 401 counselors and employing validated tools such as the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) Scale, Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), and the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), the study employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to reveal that mindfulness significantly buffers the impact of these stressors on burnout. Specifically, mindfulness accounted for 24.20% of the effect of Job Appraisal, 19.34% of Job Required, and 18.00% of Teachers' Professionalism on burnout. The findings underscore the importance of culturally adapted mindfulness interventions in educational settings to mitigate burnout and enhance counselor well-being.
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INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

Job burnout among counselors is increasingly recognized as a critical issue, particularly in high-stress environments such as universities, where mental health professionals manage substantial workloads, emotional demands, and interpersonal challenges (Liang et al., 2022). Burnout negatively impacts not only the counselors' well-being but also their effectiveness in providing care to students (Wang & Liu, 2023). The independent variables—Job Appraisal, Job Required, and Teachers' Professionalism—are key factors that contribute to burnout, measured respectively by the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) Scale, Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model, and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) constructs (Lee et al., 2021). Mindfulness, a psychological construct characterized by purposeful and non-judgmental attention to the present moment, has been increasingly recognized for its role in reducing burnout by enhancing self-regulation, emotional resilience, and stress coping mechanisms (Gu et al., 2022). Recent research highlights that mindfulness interventions can significantly alleviate symptoms of burnout, especially in the context of post-pandemic stress and increased job demands among healthcare and educational professionals (Smith et al., 2021). However, there is limited cross-cultural research on the mediating role of mindfulness between workplace stressors and burnout, particularly within Chinese universities,

where cultural nuances may influence both the perception of burnout and the effectiveness of mindfulness practices (Zhang & Xie, 2022). By examining how mindfulness mediates the relationship between Job Appraisal, Job Required, Teachers' Professionalism, and burnout, this study aims to fill this gap and provide insights for targeted interventions to reduce burnout among counselors in Chinese educational settings.

Literature Review

The relationship between job burnout and various workplace factors has been extensively studied, with a growing body of literature focusing on specific variables such as Job Appraisal, Job Required, and Teachers' Professionalism. Job Appraisal, often measured through the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) Scale, assesses the imbalance between the efforts expended at work and the rewards received, such as recognition, job security, and salary. Studies have consistently shown that higher effort-reward imbalances are linked to increased burnout, particularly in high-stress professions like counseling (Bakker et al., 2021; Siegrist et al., 2020). Job Required, assessed through the Job Demand-Control-Support (JDACS) model, explores how job demands, control, and social support impact stress and burnout levels. Recent research highlights that high job demands coupled with low control and support significantly predict burnout, underscoring the importance of supportive work environments in mitigating these effects (van der Heijden et al., 2020; He et al., 2021). Furthermore, the JDACS model has been validated in various educational settings, emphasizing its robustness in predicting burnout across different cultures (de Jonge et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2021). Teachers' Professionalism, which can be measured using constructs from the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), relates to professional development, efficacy, and commitment, all of which are crucial in understanding burnout among educators. Studies suggest that a lack of professional growth opportunities and perceived competence contributes to higher burnout rates among counselors, particularly in educational settings (Kim & Lee, 2021; Lent et al., 2020). Research also indicates that enhancing teachers' professionalism through targeted interventions can reduce burnout and improve job satisfaction (Yada et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022).

Mindfulness has emerged as a significant psychological construct in recent studies, particularly for its potential role in mitigating burnout. Mindfulness practices, which involve maintaining a moment-to-moment awareness of one's experiences without judgment, have been shown to improve emotional regulation, reduce stress, and enhance overall well-being (Hofmann et al., 2021; Creswell & Lindsay, 2020). There is increasing evidence that mindfulness not only directly reduces burnout but also serves as a mediator between work-related stressors and burnout, providing a buffer against the adverse effects of high job demands, low job control, and professional challenges (Crego et al., 2021; Jamieson & Tuckey, 2022). Recent studies conducted in educational and healthcare settings further demonstrate that mindfulness interventions can significantly alleviate symptoms of burnout, particularly in the context of increased workloads and job insecurity following the COVID-19 pandemic (Cheng et al., 2022; Park et al., 2021). Additionally, meta-analyses have highlighted the cross-cultural relevance of mindfulness, though they underscore the need for more research in non-Western contexts to fully understand its applicability and impact (Lin et al., 2021; Chioldelli et al., 2021). Despite the growing evidence, there remains a gap in understanding how mindfulness mediates the relationship between job-related factors and burnout in Chinese universities, where cultural nuances may influence both the perception of burnout and the effectiveness of mindfulness practices (Liu et al., 2022; Zhang & Xie, 2022). This study aims to address this gap by examining the mediating role of mindfulness in the relationship between Job Appraisal, Job Required, Teachers' Professionalism, and burnout among counselors in Chinese educational settings.

Research Gap and Objectives

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of mindfulness in mitigating burnout, the majority of existing studies have focused on Western contexts, with limited exploration of how these

relationships manifest in non-Western settings, particularly within Chinese universities. Cultural differences, including attitudes towards mental health, job stress, and mindfulness practices, can significantly influence the effectiveness and perception of interventions aimed at reducing burnout (Liu et al., 2022; Wang & Wang, 2021). While recent studies have demonstrated that mindfulness can effectively buffer against job stressors and reduce burnout, the applicability of these findings to Chinese counselors remains underexplored (Cheng et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021). Additionally, although the Job Appraisal, Job Required, and Teachers' Professionalism variables have been identified as significant predictors of burnout, there is limited understanding of how mindfulness mediates these relationships in the unique cultural and professional context of Chinese educational settings (Huang et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021). This research gap is critical, as it leaves a lack of culturally tailored strategies that can effectively address burnout among counselors in Chinese universities, potentially undermining efforts to improve their well-being and job performance (Zhang & Xie, 2022).

Therefore, this study aims to fill the identified gaps by exploring the mediating role of mindfulness between job burnout and the specific workplace factors of Job Appraisal, Job Required, and Teachers' Professionalism among counselors in Chinese universities. The study's primary objective is to assess whether mindfulness can serve as a buffer, reducing the impact of these workplace stressors on burnout and enhancing counselors' ability to manage job-related challenges (Gu et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2022). By employing validated measurement tools—namely, the ERI, JDCS, and SCCT scales—this research will provide a comprehensive analysis of the interrelationships between these variables in a cross-cultural context. Additionally, this study aims to offer insights into the potential for mindfulness-based interventions tailored to the cultural nuances of Chinese educational environments, thereby contributing to the development of effective burnout prevention strategies for counselors (Smith et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2021). Ultimately, the findings are expected to inform policy and practice, guiding institutions in implementing evidence-based approaches to support the mental health and professional sustainability of counselors working in Chinese universities.

METHODS

Study Design

This study employs a cross-sectional survey design to explore the mediating role of mindfulness between job burnout and the independent variables: Job Appraisal, Job Required, and Teachers' Professionalism among counselors in Chinese universities. This approach is suitable for assessing correlations and mediations at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of the relationships between the variables.

Participants

A total of 461 questionnaires were distributed to university counselors across various institutions in Zhejiang Province, China. The sampling method used was stratified random sampling, which ensured that the sample was representative of different types of universities, including public and private institutions, and different counselor demographics. Out of the distributed questionnaires, 401 valid responses were collected, resulting in an effective response rate of approximately 87.0%.

Measures

The study employed several validated scales to assess the key variables, ensuring both cultural relevance and reliability in the Chinese context.

Job Appraisal was measured using the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) Scale, which evaluates the balance between the efforts expended at work and the rewards received. The ERI scale, widely used in occupational health research, has been adapted for cultural relevance in China through rigorous translation and back-translation procedures (Siegrist et al., 2020). This scale was chosen for its robustness in capturing job-related stress and its demonstrated applicability across various cultural

contexts.

Job Required was assessed using the Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model, which evaluates job demands, the level of control over job tasks, and the amount of social support available. The JDCS model has been extensively validated in educational settings, including within Chinese universities, making it a suitable tool for this study (Huang et al., 2021). The model's ability to capture the interplay between job demands, control, and support is crucial for understanding the dynamics of burnout.

Teachers' Professionalism was measured using constructs from the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), focusing on self-efficacy, professional development, and career commitment. These constructs have been used extensively in educational research to assess the professionalism of educators, and their relevance has been confirmed in various cultural contexts, including China (Lent et al., 2020; Wang & Wang, 2021). The SCCT constructs were selected for their effectiveness in capturing the professional attitudes and behaviors that influence burnout.

Mindfulness was evaluated using the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), which assesses mindfulness across five dimensions: observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging, and non-reactivity. The FFMQ has been adapted and validated for use in various cultural settings, including China, providing reliable measures of mindfulness (Gu et al., 2022). This scale was chosen for its comprehensive approach to measuring mindfulness, which is critical for examining its role in mediating burnout.

Job Burnout was measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey (MBI-ES), focusing on emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The MBI-ES is a widely accepted tool in educational research for evaluating burnout severity among educators and counselors (Maslach & Leiter, 2021). Its proven reliability and validity in diverse cultural settings, including China, make it an appropriate choice for this study.

Each of these scales was selected based on their established reliability and validity in both Western and non-Western contexts, ensuring that the measures were appropriate for the Chinese university counselor population. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to validate the measurement models for each scale, with all factor loadings and model fit indices falling within acceptable ranges, confirming the constructs' validity and reliability.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted via an online survey platform, allowing for efficient distribution among university counselors in Zhejiang Province, China. The survey link was disseminated through institutional email systems, with participants providing informed consent electronically before beginning the survey. To ensure confidentiality, all responses were anonymized, and data were securely stored on encrypted servers, accessible only to the research team. The study was approved by the institutional review board (IRB) in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki, emphasizing the ethical treatment of participants. The survey, pre-tested with a small sample to refine clarity and functionality, utilized skip logic to streamline the process. Data collection spanned four weeks, with reminders sent to maximize participation, resulting in a representative sample. Throughout the process, measures were taken to ensure data quality, with incomplete responses excluded from analysis, providing a robust dataset for the study.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS software. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize demographic characteristics and variable scores. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to validate the measurement models for each scale, ensuring construct validity and reliability. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the hypothesized mediation models, examining the indirect effects of the independent variables on burnout through mindfulness.

Bootstrap methods with 5,000 resamples were utilized to assess the significance of the mediation pathways.

Ethical Considerations

All research activities complied with ethical standards as outlined by the institutional review board and the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and all data were securely stored with access restricted to the research team.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated to provide an overview of the key variables in the study, including Job Appraisal (Effort-Reward Imbalance), Job Required (Job Demand-Control-Support), Teachers' Professionalism (Social Cognitive Career Theory constructs), Mindfulness (Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire), and Job Burnout (Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey). The sample consisted of 401 university counselors from Zhejiang Province, with the mean and standard deviation for each variable reported to assess the central tendencies and variability.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables and Their Dimensions

Scale	Dimensions	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
ERI	Effort	401	25.8504	8.85255	.679	.122	-.947	.243
	Reward	401	33.8504	11.71057	.257	.122	-1.524	.243
	Overcommitment	401	16.1596	4.96230	-.156	.122	-.513	.243
JDCS	Job Demands	401	24.6309	6.84386	-.591	.122	-.437	.243
	Job Control	401	23.5860	8.71712	.394	.122	-.942	.243
	Social Support	401	16.9302	6.86149	.516	.122	-.628	.243
SCCT	SE	401	27.8105	5.55554	-1.548	.122	1.584	.243
	OE	401	13.5810	2.34713	-1.608	.122	2.600	.243
	CG	401	12.4539	2.31052	-.994	.122	1.372	.243
	CSB	401	10.5736	2.88448	1.373	.122	2.448	.243

FFMQ	Observing	401	19.678 3	5.46432	.395	.122	.291	.243
	Describing	401	19.294 3	4.88807	-.014	.122	.187	.243
	Acting with Awareness	401	20.710 7	5.56068	.184	.122	-.046	.243
	Nonjudging of Inner Experience	401	19.890 3	6.18772	-.399	.122	-.288	.243
	Nonreactivity to Inner Experience	401	15.960 1	6.37247	.983	.122	-.096	.243
MBI-ES	EE	401	43.344 1	8.23112	.520	.122	-.945	.243
	DP	401	24.296 8	5.24826	.312	.122	-.762	.243
	PA	401	48.443 9	8.76655	-.466	.122	-.965	.243

For Job Appraisal, measured by the ERI Scale, the Effort dimension had a mean of 25.85 (SD = 8.85), indicating moderate levels of perceived effort among counselors. The Reward dimension showed a mean of 33.85 (SD = 11.71), suggesting that counselors generally perceived moderate rewards in their work environment. Overcommitment, another dimension of the ERI Scale, had a mean of 16.16 (SD = 4.96), indicating varying levels of personal overcommitment.

In terms of Job Required, assessed through the JDCS model, the Job Demands dimension had a mean of 24.63 (SD = 6.84), reflecting moderate job demands. The Job Control dimension had a mean of 23.59 (SD = 8.72), indicating moderate control over job tasks, while the Social Support dimension showed a mean of 16.93 (SD = 6.86), reflecting moderate levels of perceived support from colleagues and supervisors.

For Teachers' Professionalism, measured using SCCT constructs, Self-Efficacy had a mean of 27.81 (SD = 5.56), indicating a generally high level of confidence in professional abilities. Outcome Expectations had a mean of 13.58 (SD = 2.35), while Career Goals and Career Support Behaviors had means of 12.45 (SD = 2.31) and 10.57 (SD = 2.88), respectively, suggesting counselors are moderately engaged in professional development activities.

Mindfulness levels, assessed using the FFMQ, were reported across its five dimensions. The Observing dimension had a mean of 19.68 (SD = 5.46), Describing had a mean of 19.29 (SD = 4.89), Acting with Awareness had a mean of 20.71 (SD = 5.56), Nonjudging had a mean of 19.89 (SD = 6.19), and Nonreactivity had a mean of 15.96 (SD = 6.37). These scores indicate that counselors possess moderate levels of mindfulness, with some variability across different facets.

Finally, for Job Burnout, as measured by the MBI-ES, Emotional Exhaustion had a mean of 43.34 (SD = 8.23), Depersonalization had a mean of 24.30 (SD = 5.25), and Personal Accomplishment had a mean of 48.44 (SD = 8.77). These results suggest that the sample of counselors experienced moderate to high levels of burnout, particularly in terms of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

Overall, these descriptive statistics provide a comprehensive overview of the sample's characteristics, highlighting the central tendencies and variability in the key variables related to burnout among university counselors. This foundational data supports the subsequent analyses, helping to

contextualize the relationships explored in this study.

Mediation Analysis

To explore the mediating role of mindfulness between the independent variables (Job Appraisal, Job Required, and Teachers' Professionalism) and the dependent variable (Job Burnout), a mediation analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This approach allowed for the examination of both direct and indirect effects, providing insights into how mindfulness might buffer the impact of job stressors on burnout among university counselors.

Table 2: Mediation Analysis of Mindfulness Between Job Appraisal, Job Required, Teachers' Professionalism, and Job Burnout

Effect Relationship	Path	Estimate	Effect Proportion	95% Confidence Interval
Direct Effects	Job Appraisal→Job Burnout	0.199	63.38%	/
	Job Required→Job Burnout	0.211	69.18%	/
	Teachers' Professionalism→Job Burnout	-0.287	71.75%	/
Indirect Effects	Job Appraisal→Mindfulness level→Job Burnout	0.076	24.20%	[0.027, 0.130]
	Job Required→Mindfulness level→Job Burnout	0.059	19.34%	[0.023, 0.105]
	Teachers' Professionalism→Mindfulness level→Job Burnout	-0.072	18.00%	[-0.128, -0.023]
Gross effect	Job Appraisal→Job Burnout	0.314		/
	Job Required→Job Burnout	0.305		/
	Teachers' Professionalism→Job Burnout	-0.400		/
Note: **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05; Bootstrapping samples 5000 times, and the path coefficients are standardized coefficients.				

The analysis revealed significant direct effects of Job Appraisal on Job Burnout ($\beta = 0.199$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher effort-reward imbalances are associated with increased levels of burnout.

Similarly, Job Required had a significant direct effect on Job Burnout ($\beta = 0.211, p < 0.01$), demonstrating that higher job demands, coupled with lower control and support, contribute to higher burnout levels. Teachers' Professionalism also exhibited a significant direct effect on Job Burnout ($\beta = -0.287, p < 0.01$), suggesting that higher levels of professionalism are associated with lower burnout levels.

Mindfulness was found to significantly mediate the relationship between these job stressors and burnout. The indirect effect of Job Appraisal on Job Burnout through mindfulness was significant (indirect effect = 0.076, 95% CI [0.027, 0.130]), accounting for 24.20% of the total effect. This indicates that higher mindfulness levels can mitigate the adverse impact of effort-reward imbalance on burnout, providing a protective buffer against job-related stress.

Similarly, the mediation analysis showed that Job Required also had a significant indirect effect on Job Burnout through mindfulness (indirect effect = 0.059, 95% CI [0.023, 0.105]), with mindfulness accounting for 19.34% of the total effect. This finding underscores the role of mindfulness in helping counselors manage high job demands and limited control or support, thereby reducing the likelihood of burnout.

For Teachers' Professionalism, the mediation analysis indicated a significant indirect effect on Job Burnout through mindfulness (indirect effect = -0.072, 95% CI [-0.128, -0.023]), with mindfulness accounting for 18.00% of the total effect. This result highlights that mindfulness can enhance the protective effects of professionalism, further reducing the risk of burnout among counselors.

Overall, the mediation analysis confirms that mindfulness plays a crucial role in mediating the relationship between job stressors and burnout. By enhancing mindfulness, counselors may better manage the stress associated with job appraisal, job demands, and professionalism, thereby reducing their overall levels of burnout. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating mindfulness-based interventions in educational settings to support counselor well-being and improve job performance.

Cross-Cultural Validation

Cross-cultural validation was a critical component of this study, ensuring that the measurement tools originally developed in Western contexts were appropriate and reliable for the Chinese university counselor population. This validation process involved assessing the construct validity, internal consistency, and overall model fit of the scales used: the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) Scale, Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) constructs, Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), and Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey (MBI-ES).

Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Fit Indices for Measurement Models

Fit Index	ERI Scale	JDCS Scale	SCCT Constructs	FFMQ	MBI-ES
χ^2	486.666	760.026	505.291	1311.38	563.927
χ^2/df	1.516	3.393	2.761	2.546	2.484
RMSEA	0.036	0.079	0.066	0.064	0.062
NFI	0.933	0.921	0.876	0.86	0.916
TLI	0.974	0.935	0.904	0.901	0.942
GFI	0.92	0.874	0.899	0.842	0.912
RFI	0.927	0.911	0.857	0.847	0.906

IFI	0.976	0.943	0.917	0.91	0.948
CFI	0.976	0.943	0.916	0.909	0.948
RMR	0.051	0.07	0.037	0.056	0.051

Construct validity was evaluated through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The CFA results demonstrated acceptable fit indices across all scales, confirming their suitability in the Chinese context. Specifically, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) values were above 0.90, indicating good model fit. The Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) also exceeded 0.90, reinforcing the scales' construct validity. Furthermore, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) values were below 0.08, signifying that the models had a reasonable approximation of the observed data.

Internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's alpha, with all scales demonstrating strong internal reliability. The ERI Scale had Cronbach's alpha values of 0.94 for Effort, 0.87 for Reward, and 0.88 for Overcommitment, indicating high reliability in measuring these constructs. The JDCS model also showed robust reliability, with alpha values of 0.86 for Job Demands, 0.88 for Job Control, and 0.90 for Social Support. Similarly, the SCCT constructs had alpha values ranging from 0.90 to 0.94, while the FFMQ and MBI-ES scales recorded alpha values of 0.94 and 0.90, respectively. These high alpha values confirm that the scales used are reliable tools for assessing job stressors, mindfulness, and burnout in the Chinese educational context.

Factor loadings were scrutinized to determine the strength of the relationships between the observed variables and their underlying latent constructs. The factor loadings across all scales were consistently high, ranging from 0.74 to 0.82. For instance, the ERI Scale demonstrated strong factor loadings within this range for Effort, Reward, and Overcommitment, ensuring that these constructs were accurately measured. The JDCS model, SCCT constructs, FFMQ, and MBI-ES scales also exhibited robust factor loadings, further supporting the validity of these instruments in capturing the intended dimensions of job stressors, mindfulness, and burnout among Chinese counselors.

Model fit was confirmed by evaluating multiple indices, all of which fell within acceptable ranges. The CFI values were consistently above 0.90, while the TLI values exceeded 0.90, indicating a good fit between the model and the observed data. The RMSEA values were below 0.08, providing additional evidence that the models were well-suited to the data. These model fit indices collectively confirm that the measurement tools used in this study are valid for the Chinese university counselor population.

The successful cross-cultural validation of these scales underscores their relevance and reliability for assessing job stressors, mindfulness, and burnout in a Chinese context. This validation not only confirms the appropriateness of the scales but also ensures that the findings from this study are culturally sensitive and generalizable to similar populations. Furthermore, the validation process highlights the importance of adapting Western-developed scales for non-Western contexts, facilitating accurate and meaningful cross-cultural comparisons in occupational health research.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study provide critical insights into the complex relationships between job-related stressors and burnout among university counselors in Chinese universities, with a particular focus on the mediating role of mindfulness. The results confirm that mindfulness significantly mediates the relationship between key job stressors—Job Appraisal, Job Required, and Teachers' Professionalism—and burnout, underscoring the importance of psychological resilience in occupational settings.

Mindfulness as a Mediator: The study's findings highlight that mindfulness serves as a crucial buffer against the adverse effects of job stressors on burnout. Specifically, the mediation analysis revealed that mindfulness accounted for 24.20% of the effect of Job Appraisal on burnout, 19.34% of the effect of Job Required on burnout, and 18.00% of the effect of Teachers' Professionalism on burnout. These results suggest that counselors who exhibit higher levels of mindfulness are better equipped to manage the stress associated with job appraisal, demands, and professional challenges. This aligns with previous research indicating that mindfulness enhances emotional regulation, reduces stress, and promotes well-being (Creswell & Lindsay, 2020). By fostering a mindful approach, counselors may develop greater resilience, which in turn mitigates the impact of job-related stressors, reducing the likelihood of burnout.

Impact of Job Appraisal (Effort-Reward Imbalance): The direct effect of Job Appraisal, as measured by the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) Scale, on burnout was significant, with higher imbalances between effort and reward leading to increased levels of burnout among counselors. This finding is consistent with the literature, which posits that when the rewards of work do not match the effort invested, individuals experience heightened stress, dissatisfaction, and ultimately burnout (Siegrist et al., 2020). The significant indirect effect through mindfulness further underscores the potential of mindfulness interventions to alleviate the negative consequences of perceived effort-reward imbalances. Enhancing mindfulness could therefore be an effective strategy to address this imbalance, helping counselors maintain their well-being even in the face of insufficient rewards.

Impact of Job Required (Job Demand-Control-Support): The study also found that Job Required, as assessed by the Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model, had a significant direct impact on burnout. High job demands, coupled with low control and limited social support, were strongly associated with increased burnout levels. These findings are in line with previous research suggesting that jobs with high demands and low control are particularly stressful, leading to higher burnout risks (Huang et al., 2021). The significant mediation effect of mindfulness in this context highlights its role in helping counselors navigate high-pressure environments. Mindfulness practices, which encourage present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance, may enable counselors to better manage their job demands and the stress associated with a lack of control or support. This protective effect of mindfulness could be particularly beneficial in educational settings where job demands are inherently high.

Impact of Teachers' Professionalism (SCCT Constructs): Teachers' Professionalism, measured through constructs from the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), also exhibited a significant direct effect on burnout, with higher levels of professionalism associated with lower burnout. This relationship underscores the importance of professional development, self-efficacy, and career commitment in mitigating burnout. The significant indirect effect of Teachers' Professionalism on burnout through mindfulness further suggests that cultivating mindfulness can enhance the protective effects of professionalism. Counselors who are both professionally competent and mindful are likely to experience lower levels of burnout, as mindfulness can bolster their ability to cope with the challenges of their professional roles. This finding supports the idea that interventions aimed at increasing both mindfulness and professional development could be particularly effective in reducing burnout among university counselors.

Cross-Cultural Validation of Scales: The successful cross-cultural validation of the measurement tools used in this study is a significant finding that reinforces the robustness of the results. The validation process confirmed that the Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) Scale, Job Demand-Control-Support (JDCS) model, Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) constructs, Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), and Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educators Survey (MBI-ES) are reliable and valid for assessing job stressors, mindfulness, and burnout in the Chinese context. This ensures that the constructs measured are culturally appropriate, allowing for meaningful interpretations of the

findings. Moreover, this validation contributes to the broader field by demonstrating that these Western-developed scales can be effectively adapted for use in non-Western settings, facilitating cross-cultural research in occupational health.

Broader Implications for Counselor Well-being: The overall findings of this study emphasize the critical role that mindfulness plays in mediating the relationship between job stressors and burnout. By integrating mindfulness practices into the professional development programs for university counselors, educational institutions could significantly reduce burnout and improve counselor well-being. This study also highlights the need for culturally adapted mindfulness interventions that take into account the specific challenges and stressors faced by counselors in Chinese universities. The successful cross-cultural validation of the measurement tools further reinforces the relevance of these findings in the Chinese context, suggesting that similar approaches could be beneficial in other non-Western educational settings.

In summary, this study provides robust evidence that mindfulness is a key factor in mitigating the adverse effects of job-related stressors on burnout. The results not only contribute to the existing literature on occupational health and well-being but also offer practical insights for developing effective interventions aimed at reducing burnout among university counselors. Future research should continue to explore the interplay between mindfulness, job stressors, and burnout, with a focus on longitudinal studies that can provide deeper insights into the causal relationships between these variables.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have significant implications for the practice of counseling within Chinese universities, particularly in addressing the pervasive issue of burnout among counselors. The confirmation that mindfulness mediates the relationship between job stressors—such as Job Appraisal, Job Required, and Teachers' Professionalism—and burnout highlights the importance of integrating mindfulness-based interventions into the professional development of university counselors.

Integrating Mindfulness Training into Professional Development: Given the substantial mediating role that mindfulness plays in reducing burnout, educational institutions should consider incorporating structured mindfulness training into their counselor professional development programs. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) are well-established programs that have been shown to enhance emotional regulation, reduce stress, and improve overall well-being (Creswell & Lindsay, 2020). Implementing these programs could equip counselors with the tools necessary to manage high job demands, low control, and the perceived imbalance between effort and reward. Regular mindfulness workshops, online mindfulness modules, and dedicated mindfulness sessions could be integrated into existing training frameworks, tailored to the specific cultural context and challenges faced by counselors in Chinese universities.

Enhancing Job Resources: Control, Support, and Reward Systems: The study underscores the need to enhance job resources, particularly in terms of control, support, and reward systems, to mitigate the impact of job demands on burnout. Educational institutions should explore ways to increase counselors' autonomy and decision-making power within their roles. This could include offering flexible working arrangements, involving counselors in policy-making processes, and providing opportunities to shape their work environments. Moreover, increasing social support through peer networks, supervision, and mentorship programs can play a critical role in reducing burnout. Creating a culture of collaboration and support, where counselors can regularly share experiences and seek guidance from more experienced colleagues, can alleviate feelings of isolation and stress. Furthermore, institutions should establish formal recognition programs to reward counselors'

efforts, balancing the effort-reward dynamic and addressing the direct effects of effort-reward imbalances on burnout.

Promoting Professionalism through Targeted Interventions: The findings also suggest that promoting professionalism through targeted interventions could significantly reduce burnout. Professional development initiatives that focus on enhancing self-efficacy, career commitment, and continuous learning are essential. Educational institutions should provide opportunities for counselors to engage in ongoing education, attend conferences, participate in professional workshops, and involve themselves in research activities. These opportunities not only contribute to professional growth but also help build resilience against burnout by reinforcing counselors' sense of competence and career satisfaction. Establishing clear career pathways and offering resources for professional advancement can further enhance counselors' professional identities, thereby reducing the risk of burnout associated with feelings of stagnation or lack of progress.

Culturally Tailored Mindfulness Interventions: The successful cross-cultural validation of the scales used in this study emphasizes the importance of culturally tailoring interventions to ensure their effectiveness. Mindfulness practices and professional development programs should be adapted to reflect the values, beliefs, and practices prevalent in Chinese society. For instance, integrating elements of traditional Chinese practices, such as Tai Chi or meditation, into mindfulness training could resonate more deeply with counselors, increasing the likelihood of sustained engagement with these practices. Additionally, fostering an environment that acknowledges and respects cultural norms around work, stress, and mental health can make mindfulness interventions more relevant and accessible to counselors.

Institutional Support and Policy Development: Finally, the study highlights the critical role of institutional support in implementing these practices effectively. Educational institutions must prioritize the mental health and well-being of their counselors by developing policies that address workload management, regular mental health assessments, and crisis intervention protocols. Leadership commitment to counselor welfare is essential in setting the tone for a supportive work culture. By institutionalizing these practices, universities can create a sustainable framework that not only supports counselors in their roles but also enhances their ability to provide high-quality care to students.

In conclusion, the study provides clear evidence that integrating mindfulness practices, enhancing job resources, promoting professionalism, and ensuring cultural relevance are key strategies for reducing burnout among university counselors in Chinese educational settings. These interventions, supported by strong institutional policies, can help create a healthier, more supportive work environment, ultimately improving both counselor well-being and the quality of student support services.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality between job stressors, mindfulness, and burnout. Future longitudinal studies are needed to establish causal relationships and observe how these variables interact over time.

Secondly, the use of self-reported measures may introduce response biases, such as social desirability or inaccurate self-assessment. Although validated scales were used, relying solely on self-reports can affect the reliability of the data. Incorporating additional data sources, like peer assessments or objective performance metrics, could provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Lastly, the sample was limited to university counselors in Zhejiang Province, which may affect the generalizability of the results to other regions or professional groups. Cultural and contextual factors

unique to this setting may influence the experiences of job stress and mindfulness, suggesting that these findings might not directly apply to counselors in different contexts. Future research should aim to replicate these findings in diverse settings to enhance their applicability.

Future Research

This study has laid a foundational understanding of the role of mindfulness in mediating the relationship between job stressors and burnout among university counselors in Chinese universities. However, future research should address the limitations of the current study, particularly its cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to draw causal inferences. Longitudinal studies are recommended to track changes in mindfulness, job stressors, and burnout over time, offering insights into how these variables interact dynamically. Additionally, experimental studies, such as randomized controlled trials, could further validate the causal impact of mindfulness-based interventions on reducing burnout.

Future studies should also consider expanding the scope of research by including additional mediators and moderators that may influence the relationship between job stressors and burnout. Variables such as resilience, emotional intelligence, organizational support, and coping strategies could provide a more nuanced understanding of the protective factors against burnout. Moreover, exploring the interplay between these factors and mindfulness could reveal deeper insights into the mechanisms that underlie effective stress management in educational settings. Researchers should also investigate how demographic factors, such as age, gender, and years of experience, might moderate these relationships.

Finally, cross-cultural and comparative studies are essential to enhance the generalizability of the findings. While this study focused on university counselors in Zhejiang Province, similar research in different regions of China or other countries would provide valuable comparative data, highlighting cultural or institutional differences that might affect the efficacy of mindfulness interventions. Additionally, future research should continue refining and culturally adapting the measurement tools used in this study to ensure they accurately capture the experiences of diverse populations. By pursuing these avenues, future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive and globally relevant understanding of burnout and its mitigation in educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided significant insights into the complex relationships between job stressors, mindfulness, and burnout among university counselors in Chinese universities. By demonstrating that mindfulness serves as a crucial mediator, the research highlights the potential of mindfulness-based interventions to mitigate the negative effects of occupational stressors. The findings suggest that counselors who engage in mindfulness practices are better equipped to manage high job demands, imbalances in effort and reward, and challenges related to professional development, ultimately reducing their risk of burnout.

The successful cross-cultural validation of the measurement tools used in this study further underscores the robustness of these findings. The ERI Scale, JDCA model, SCCT constructs, FFMQ, and MBI-ES were all adapted and validated for the Chinese context, ensuring that the constructs measured were culturally relevant and accurately reflected the experiences of university counselors in this setting. This validation not only enhances the credibility of the current study but also contributes valuable resources for future research in similar cultural contexts.

In practical terms, the study offers important implications for educational institutions, particularly those within the Chinese higher education system. Integrating mindfulness-based interventions into the professional development programs for university counselors could significantly reduce burnout and improve overall well-being. Additionally, by enhancing job resources—such as increasing control,

social support, and recognition—institutions can create a more supportive work environment that mitigates the impact of job demands on counselors. These practical strategies are essential for fostering a healthier and more productive workforce, ultimately benefiting both counselors and the students they serve.

Beyond the immediate context of university counseling, the findings of this study contribute to the broader discourse on occupational health and well-being. The research underscores the importance of psychological resilience, particularly mindfulness, as a protective factor against burnout. It also highlights the need for culturally adapted interventions that reflect the specific stressors and coping mechanisms prevalent in different cultural settings. As such, this study adds to the growing body of literature that advocates for a more holistic approach to managing workplace stress, one that integrates both psychological and organizational strategies.

In conclusion, this study advances our understanding of the interplay between job stressors, mindfulness, and burnout in educational settings, particularly within the Chinese context. The findings have practical relevance for educational institutions seeking to support their counselors more effectively and offer broader contributions to the field of occupational health. As we continue to explore these relationships, it is crucial to consider the cultural and institutional contexts in which they occur, ensuring that interventions are both evidence-based and culturally responsive. By doing so, we can develop more effective strategies to enhance the well-being of university counselors and the quality of care they provide to students.

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SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Table 4: Stratified sampling specification

University Level (Quantity)	Quantity of Counselors	Sample Size Required	Age Groups	Education Levels	Professional Titles	Income Variation
National Key Universities (N=1)	92	5	<30: 2	Bachelor's: 0	Junior: 1	Low: 1
			30-40: 2	Master's: 3	Intermediate: 2	Medium: 2
			>40: 1	Doctorate: 2	Senior: 2	High: 2
Provincial Key Universities (N=12)	1075	46	<30: 15	Bachelor's: 10	Junior: 10	Low: 10
			30-40: 16	Master's: 26	Intermediate: 26	Medium: 26
			>40: 15	Doctorate: 10	Senior: 10	High: 10
Local General Universities (N=47)	4219	169	<30: 56	Bachelor's: 28	Junior: 27	Low: 32
			30-40: 68	Master's: 111	Intermediate: 115	Medium: 124
			>40: 45	Doctorate: 30	Senior: 27	High: 13
Junior Colleges (N=49)	4554	181	<30: 71	Bachelor's: 37	Junior: 57	Low: 17
			30-40: 61	Master's: 135	Intermediate: 113	Medium: 146
			>40: 49	Doctorate: 9	Senior: 11	High: 18
Sum	9940	401	401	401	401	401