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THE EFFECT OF WORK AND FAMILY SUPPORT ON
JOB BURNOUT AMONG PRIVATE UNIVERSITY
ADMINISTRATORS IN QINGDAO WITH THE
MEDIATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL
SAFETY AND PROFESSIONAL
IDENTITY



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THESIS PRESENTED TO QUALIFY FOR A DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT AND ECONOMIC
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY
2025



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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to determine the direct effect of work support (WS) and family support (FS) on psychological safety (PS) and professional identity (PI), the direct effects of WS, FS, PS, and PI on job burnout (JB) among private university administrators in Qingdao and the mediating effects of PS and PI in the studied relationships. This research employed a quantitative and deductive approach. A sample of 350 administrators with more than five years of experience was selected through cluster sampling technique. Data were collected via self-administered questionnaires using the drop-off method and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The findings showed that WS ($\beta = 0.597$, p -value = 0.000) and FS ($\beta = 0.252$, p -value = 0.000) had significant positive effects on PS. Both WS ($\beta = 0.434$, $p = 0.000$) and FS ($\beta = 0.223$, $p = 0.000$) also significantly and positively influenced PI. Furthermore, WS ($\beta = -0.275$, $p < 0.001$), PS ($\beta = -0.262$, $p < 0.001$), and PI ($\beta = -0.201$, $p < 0.001$) had significant negative effects on JB, while FS ($\beta = -0.109$, $p = 0.071$) showed no significant effect on JB. Moreover, both PS and PI significantly mediated the effect of WS (p -value < 0.05) and FS (p -value < 0.05) on JB. In conclusion, to mitigate job burnout, it is essential to enhance work and family support, psychological safety, and professional identity among administrators. In implication, the private universities should focus on creating an inclusive, supportive work environment, providing career development opportunities, recognizing employee contributions, and fostering a strong sense of professional identity among their administrators.





**PENGARUH SOKONGAN KERJA DAN KELUARGA TERHADAP
KELESUAN KERJA DALAM KALANGAN PENTADBIR
UNIVERSITI SWASTA DI QINGDAO DENGAN
PENGANTARAAN KESELAMATAN
PSIKOLOGI DAN IDENTITI
PROFESIONAL**

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan pengaruh langsung sokongan kerja (WS) dan sokongan keluarga (FS) terhadap keselamatan psikologi (PS) dan identiti profesional (PI), pengaruh langsung WS, FS, PS, dan PI terhadap kelesuan kerja (JB) dalam kalangan pentadbir universiti swasta di Qingdao serta pengaruh pengantara PS dan PI dalam hubungan yang dikaji. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dan deduktif. Sampel seramai 350 orang pentadbir yang mempunyai lebih daripada lima tahun pengalaman telah dipilih menggunakan teknik pensampelan berkelompok. Data dikumpulkan melalui soal selidik yang ditadbir sendiri menggunakan kaedah serahan dan dianalisis menggunakan Permodelan Persamaan Struktural (SEM). Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa WS ($\beta = 0.597$, nilai- $p = 0.000$) dan FS ($\beta = 0.252$, nilai- $p = 0.000$) mempunyai pengaruh positif yang signifikan terhadap PS. Kedua-dua WS ($\beta = 0.434$, $p = 0.000$) dan FS ($\beta = 0.223$, $p = 0.000$) juga memberi pengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap PI. Selain itu, WS ($\beta = -0.275$, $p < 0.001$), PS ($\beta = -0.262$, $p < 0.001$), dan PI ($\beta = -0.201$, $p < 0.001$) memberi pengaruh negatif yang signifikan terhadap JB, manakala FS ($\beta = -0.109$, $p = 0.071$) menunjukkan tiada pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap JB. Selain itu, kedua-dua PS dan PI secara signifikan mengantara pengaruh WS (nilai- $p < 0.05$) dan FS (nilai- $p < 0.05$) terhadap JB. Kesimpulannya, untuk mengurangkan kelesuan kerja, adalah penting untuk meningkatkan sokongan kerja dan keluarga, keselamatan psikologi, dan identiti profesional di kalangan pentadbir. Implikasinya, universiti swasta harus memberi tumpuan kepada mewujudkan persekitaran kerja yang inklusif dan menyokong, menyediakan peluang pembangunan kerjaya, mengiktiraf sumbangan pekerja, dan memupuk rasa identiti profesional yang kukuh di kalangan pentadbir mereka.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMOS	Analysis of Moment Structure
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CMB	Common Method Bias
COR	Conservation of Resources
CR	Construct Reliability
D ²	Mahalanobis distance
df	Degree of Freedom
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
FIML	Full Information Maximum Likelihood
FS	Family Support
GOF	Goodness-of-Fit
IC	Inter-construct Correlations
JB	Job Burnout
JD-R	Job Demands-Resources





KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
MLE	Maximum Likelihood Estimation
PI	Professional Identity
PS	Psychological Safety
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
SRMR	Standardized Root Mean Square Residual
TLI	Tucker-Lewis index
WS	Work Support

 χ^2 



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



1.1 Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of the research structure. Section 1.1 introduces the study, followed by Section 1.2, which presents the research background. The problem statement is outlined in Section 1.3, while Sections 1.4 and 1.5 define the research questions and objectives, respectively. Section 1.6 discusses the research hypothesis. Additionally, Sections 1.7, 1.8, and 1.9 cover the research framework, contributions, and operational definitions. Finally, in 1.10 and 1.11, the scope and the structure of this research is described, while section 1.12 summarizes this chapter.





1.2 Research Background

Job burnout has become a critical global issue, driven not only by challenges within specific industries but also by larger global forces such as economic globalization, technological advancements, and socio-economic changes (Otterbach et al., 2021; Carrière, 2020). It was revealed from a 2022 survey that 90% of respondents across various industries were experiencing job burnout (Karagöl & Kaya, 2022; Huo et al., 2021). Recent research by Boston Consulting Group (2024) showed that, on average, 48% of workers globally struggled with burnout. Given the severity of this problem, it was understandable why the World Health Organization officially recognized job burnout as a workplace phenomenon in the International Classification of Diseases in May 2019. Even more concerning was that in the 2022 Work Trend Index by Microsoft, it was reported that over half of managers (53%) across multiple industries and companies globally are experiencing burnout, a rate slightly higher than that of the general employee population (Klinghoffer & Kirkpatrick-Husk, 2023).

In China, the prevalence of job burnout was equally concerning, which in 2022, 14.4% of employees reported experiencing moderate burnout, while 41.4% were facing severe burnout (Statista, 2023). Hence, these statistics clearly demonstrate the critical nature of the problem, indicating that if no prompt and effective measures are taken, these figures could rise, further undermining employee productivity and performance,





as well as jeopardizing the long-term survival of businesses (China Human Resources Development Network, 2023). The situation is particularly alarming among managers and administrators, as their burnout not only impacts their own performance but also has a cascading effect on their teams and the broader organization. Given that more than half of employees are experiencing job burnout, addressing this issue in China is imperative to safeguard both workforce well-being and organizational success.

The COVID-19 pandemic had significantly aggravated the situation, particularly within China's education sector, where burnout rates had surged by nearly 19.8% compared to pre-pandemic levels (China Human Resources Development Network, 2023). The number of individuals experiencing job burnout had risen progressively, as shown in Figure 1.1. Specifically, before the pandemic, the burnout level was 5.14 out of 10 (51.4%), which increased to 6.16 (61.6%) immediately after COVID-19 and had since risen to 6.44 (64.4%) in 2022. The Job Burnout Index Survey in China further revealed that education and training institutions ranked third in burnout levels across all industries, with a striking 43.98% of employees reporting burnout (51job, 2022).

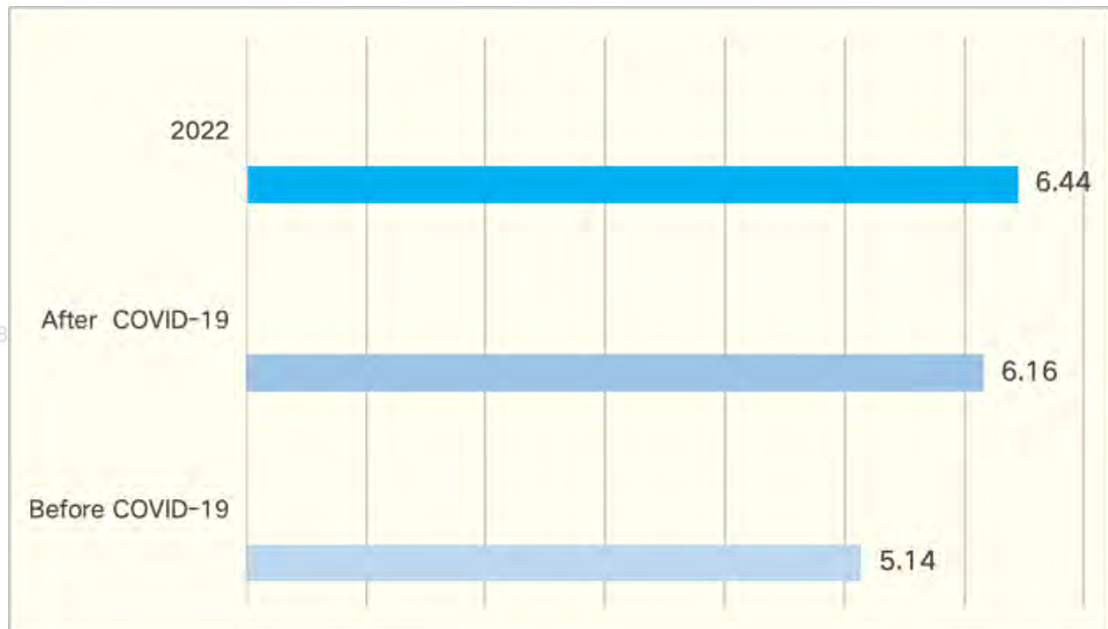
China's higher education gross enrollment rate had increased from 30% in 2012 to 57.8% in 2021, and to 60.2% in 2023, indicating that higher education had entered a universally recognized stage (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2022; Guangming Daily, 2025). As higher education rapidly developed, the role of



private universities had become increasingly significant, drawing attention from various sectors of society (Luo et al., 2024). Accordingly, addressing burnout in this critical sector is essential for sustaining the quality and well-being of the administrators, educators and students.

Figure 1.1

Proportions of Burnout Dimensions In Education At Different Stages (2022 Job Burnout Report)



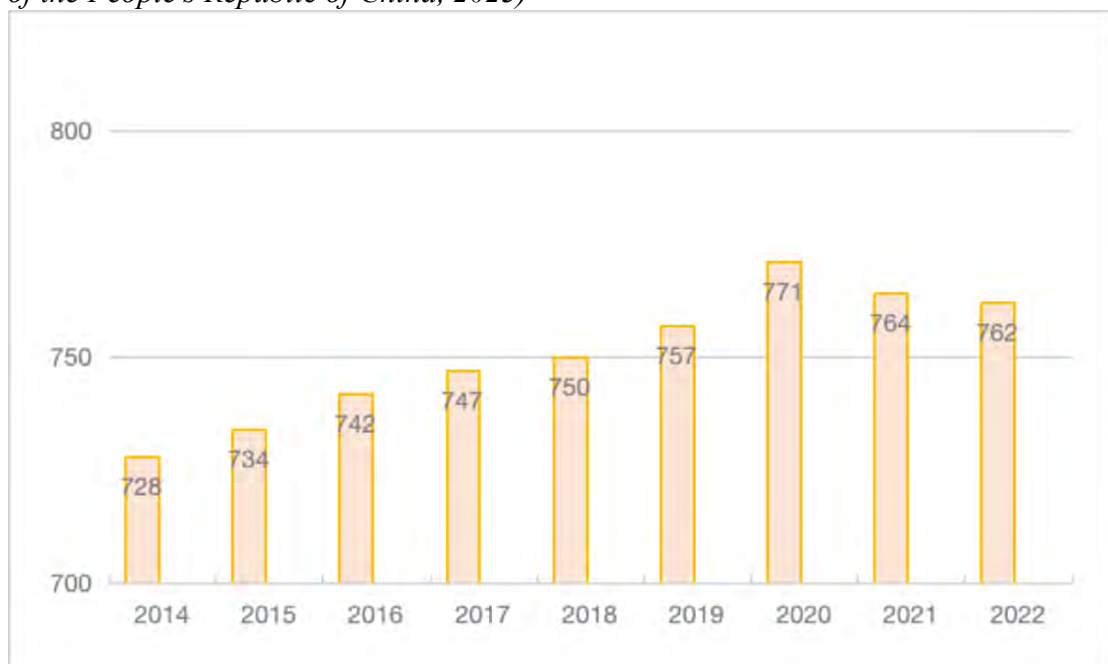
Note, 1-10 points: 1 is the least serious, 10 is the most serious

After 20 years of development, China's private universities had expanded to comprise over one-fifth of all universities in the country. As depicted in Figure 1.2, the number of private universities in China had been substantial (Guangming Daily, 2023). In 2020, China had 771 private universities, marking an increase of 14 universities from 2019. This growth represented 28.16% of the total number of universities in the country

(Guangming Daily, 2023). However, official data revealed a shift starting in 2021, which the number of private universities began to decline. Specifically, in 2021, the sector saw a decrease of seven institutions compared to 2020, followed by another reduction of two in 2022, bringing the total down to 762, accounting for 25.36% of all universities in China (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023). Despite this decline, the sheer number of private universities continued to fuel fierce competition among them to attract students and ensure their survival (Anggadwita et al., 2024; Zhao, 2024; Yan, 2024). Hence, private universities in China were forced to remain competitive and relevant in this crowded market to avoid being driven out of the sector entirely (China Association for Non-Government Education, 2023).

Figure 1.2

The Number of Private Universities in China from 2014 till 2022 (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023)





As competition among private universities intensified, these institutions faced a variety of challenges, including financial constraints. In response to these pressures, many adopted cost-cutting measures, such as workforce reductions and the implementation of multi-role assignments for administrators (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2023; He, 2023; Wu, 2020). This trend led to a significant shift in the roles of administrators, who were increasingly expected to take on teaching responsibilities in addition to their traditional managerial duties (Ye, 2021; Li, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated this shift, as private universities faced financial strain, prompting downsizing and a greater reliance on administrators to assume dual roles (Huang & Feng, 2021).



While administrators were essential for the efficient functioning of private universities, such as managing operations, addressing concerns from both teachers and students, and enhancing the institution's social image, the additional teaching responsibilities placed a heavy burden on them (Smyth et al., 2021; Anggadwita et al., 2024). This dual role led to increased stress and a higher risk of job burnout, as administrators were required to meet the expectations of both management and teaching roles (Leo et al., 2021; Neuwirth et al., 2021). The demands of these combined responsibilities were simply too overwhelming for many to handle effectively, triggering the urgent need for strategies to reduce their workload, prevent burnout, and improve their overall performance.





Moreover, the rise in job burnout among administrators is compounded by several other challenges, including low compensation, lack of support systems, limited career advancement opportunities, and insufficient professional recognition. These factors contribute to stress, dissatisfaction, and burnout, further hindering administrators' ability to perform at their best (Xu & Wang, 2023; Yin & White, 2023; Smyth et al., 2021). A 2021 survey revealed that 40% of administrators in private institutions felt undervalued due to inadequate recognition and the absence of promotion opportunities (Wu, 2020). The absence of a robust support system, whether in resources or institutional backing, deepens feelings of isolation and frustration among administrators.



As the roles and responsibilities of private university administrators continue to expand, job burnout has become an urgent challenge to address. Administrators are facing increasing pressure, especially in the context of dual-role expectations, financial constraints, and a lack of sufficient recognition (Han & Fang, 2024; Bao, 2023). Therefore, it is essential to consider multiple approaches to effectively alleviate burnout and improve work performance. First, providing necessary resources and support is crucial to reduce the work-related pressure on administrators (Yan, 2024). On an emotional level, reducing work-family conflict helps alleviate the stress brought on by multiple roles. At the same time, creating a low-pressure environment encourages administrators to freely express their concerns, preventing emotional suppression from





worsening burnout (Xu & Wang, 2023). To address the pressure of dual roles, enhancing a sense of belonging and achievement is vital, allowing administrators to gain greater satisfaction from their work (Gilmartin et al., 2024), which in turn helps reduce burnout and improve overall work efficiency.

Specifically, in order to effectively combat job burnout, the importance of building a supportive network has been widely recognized. It includes maintaining open communication with family members about workload and stress levels, which fosters a supportive home environment (Wang et al., 2021). Family members can provide practical help, such as assisting with household tasks or childcare (Tabor et al., 2020).

At work, developing strong relationships with colleagues offers emotional support, alleviating feelings of isolation and stress (Ravalier et al., 2021; Hu & Shi, 2022).

Furthermore, cultivating a positive mindset has been proposed as a key strategy for reducing burnout. Focusing on personal strengths, celebrating accomplishments, and setting realistic expectations at work, which can also help reduce stress and prevent burnout (Kassandrinou et al., 2023).

Moreover, having a clear sense of job identity and purpose plays a vital role in alleviating burnout (Mahmoudi-Gahrouei & Hamman, 2016). Reflecting on how one's work contributes to the organization's overall goals and impacts others, as well as aligning one's work with personal values, can enhance a sense of purpose (Wang, 2022). This, in turn, improves overall satisfaction and reduces stress and burnout.





Administrators in private universities play a crucial role in higher education, and their burnout is gaining increasing scholarly attention (Liu, 2020). As key figures in the daily operations of universities, they manage and execute essential administrative tasks and are responsible for supporting the university's reform and development (Yan, 2024; Han & Fang, 2024). In addition to managing internal governance systems, they carry the important mission of both managing education and serving the community (Fang & Zuo, 2024). Administrators are vital supports for frontline teachers while also overseeing school administrative work, particularly in private institutions, where they fulfill both managerial and teaching responsibilities, making the dual roles of administration and teaching particularly challenging (He et al., 2023).



Research shows that growing job burnout among university administrators not only reduces their job satisfaction and productivity but also intensifies mental health risks (Xu & Wang, 2023). Prolonged burnout heightens anxiety and depression, weakens psychological well-being (Chen et al., 2020; García et al., 2018), diminishes professional identity and destabilizes workplace psychological safety (Liu & Aunguroch, 2018).

With the progress of the times, more and more attention has been paid to the education work of Chinese private higher education institutions, and higher requirements have been placed on education, gradually shifting from "quantity"





demand to "quality" demand (Chinese Ministry of Education, 2023). How to further improve the level of higher education, improve the quality of administrators, build a high-end team that meets the needs of society, improve the work efficiency, and reduce or even eliminate job burnout (Liu, 2024).

Given the critical nature of job burnout and the crucial role administrators play in the success of private universities in China, who often bear dual responsibilities, it is essential to identify ways to alleviate their dual burdens, particularly to reduce the potential of job burnout. Accordingly, this research aims to determine the roles of family and work support, psychological safety and professional identity in affecting job burnout, offering essential insights into how these factors can help mitigate burnout among this population.



1.3 Problem Statement

Job burnout has been escalating globally, particularly in the education sector following the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahmad et al., 2022). Private universities, in particular, are facing significant challenges in their operation and development due to factors such as financial constraints, faculty shortages, and policy uncertainty (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022; Chinese Ministry of Education, 2023). As these issues intensify, the number of private universities has been steadily decreasing, and the pressure and competition are





growing increasingly fierce, forcing them to constantly adjust their survival strategies (Gaul, 2023).

As key personnel within private universities, administrators in China are experiencing an increased workload, reduced institutional support, and expanded responsibilities amid financial constraints and limited human resources (Fleming et al., 2023). The dual pressure of administrative and teaching duties exacerbates job burnout, negatively impacting administrators' work efficiency and mental health. This leads to decreased productivity, higher turnover rates, and diminished management effectiveness. If burnout issues are not effectively addressed, they will ultimately affect the survival and development of private universities (Desai et al., 2023).



Although numerous studies have investigated the causes of burnout, they have primarily focused on factors such as work engagement, work stress, and job satisfaction, with research subjects mainly being teachers, faculty and staff of public universities, corporate employees, and those in the healthcare industry (Chen, 2023; Gilmartin et al., 2024; Peng, 2022; Liu, 2024). However, burnout among administrators, especially in private universities, has been significantly understudied, despite being more prominent under the dual pressure of limited resources and high-intensity work requirements (Zhang, 2023). Despite their critical function in institutional operations, research has largely overlooked their burnout experiences, failing to address the unique stressors and structural barriers they face (Ji & Yue, 2020). Studies indicate that burnout rates among





administrators in private universities surpass those of faculty members, yet empirical investigations remain limited (Kerrissey et al., 2022).

Burnout reduces work efficiency and negatively affects mental health, which impacts overall well-being and job performance (Aronsson et al., 2017). Enhancing psychological safety can alleviate negative emotions from work pressure, boosting confidence, reducing anxiety, and improving coping abilities (Zhao, 2024). Administrators in private universities need emotional support and practical assistance to balance work and life, reducing burnout's impact (Jia & Li, 2022). When work demands exceed available resources, adequate work support can enhance job satisfaction and psychological safety, alleviating burnout (Kuang, 2023; Liu, 2020). Family support, as an external resource, provides emotional stability, helping administrators manage stress and anxiety (Bao, 2023). These support mechanisms allow administrators to maintain high work efficiency and better mental health, enabling them to tackle work challenges more effectively (Hamouche & Marchand, 2021).

Administrators in private universities in China face the dual challenge of managing both administrative and teaching responsibilities, which increases role complexity (Bao, 2023; Chen, 2023). Especially in Shandong Province, there are 22 private universities, making it the province with the second number of private universities in China. These universities are among the top 100 private institutions in



China, and the administrators in such high-performing universities often face more significant work demands (China Science and Education Evaluation Network, 2023). Qingdao with 6 private universities, has the largest number and highest concentration in the province. The universities are closely clustered, facilitating data collection, and its rapid economic development imposes higher competitive pressures on private institutions (Sohu Culture, 2023). Administrators in such high-performing universities must strengthen their professional identity to cope with dual responsibilities, which is crucial for alleviating burnout and influencing psychological state and work motivation (Huang et al., 2022; Kassandrinou et al., 2023).

The literature review reveals that previous studies have largely attributed job burnout to either internal or external factors, often examining intrinsic or extrinsic elements in isolation. However, these studies have failed to provide a comprehensive model that integrates both internal psychological stressors and external institutional pressures (Li et al., 2023; Liu, 2020). Most research has relied on general stress models or workload theories, without fully considering the complex interplay between individual and organizational determinants of burnout (Luo, 2023).

Empirical studies indicate that job burnout arises from both external and internal factors. Externally, work pressure, inadequate or misaligned incentives, unreasonable job design, organizational systems, work environment, social support, and professional status can reduce motivation, competence, and career satisfaction, intensifying burnout



(Liu, 2020; Collins et al., 2021; Li, 2018; Qiu, 2020; Tong, 2020). Internally, unstable emotions, low job satisfaction, lack of self-regulation, insufficient professional identity, and individual personality differences also contribute to negative attitudes toward work and subsequent burnout (Zheng, 2022; Liu et al., 2019; Luo, 2023; Wang, 2022). Moreover, organizational climate, leadership behavior, and workplace culture interact with these factors (Xiang, 2020), highlighting that burnout results from a complex interplay of environmental, managerial, and psychological elements rather than a single cause.

This research addresses the gap by integrating the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory as a comprehensive framework. The JD-R Model explains burnout as an imbalance between excessive job demands and insufficient resources, encompassing both internal psychological mechanisms and external environmental factors (Bakker & De Vries, 2021; Bakker et al., 2004; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). While JD-R illustrates how burnout occurs, it does not fully explain its progressive deterioration at the individual level. The COR theory complements this by highlighting that prolonged resource depletion without adequate replenishment leads to emotional exhaustion and disengagement (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Together, these frameworks show that the interaction of internal and external resources can better address excessive work demands and mitigate burnout (Bakker & De Vries, 2021; Bakker et al., 2004).





Accordingly, this research examines how work support, family support, professional identity, and psychological safety interact to influence burnout among private university administrators, with particular attention to mediating effects to fill the existing gap. By exploring how supportive factors enhance professional identity and psychological safety to reduce burnout under high work demands, this research offers both theoretical and practical insights to improve administrators' performance, well-being, and the long-term competitiveness of private universities (Bakker & De Vries, 2021; Bakker et al., 2004; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

1.4 Research Objectives



The ultimate objective of this research was to alleviate job burnout among administrators in private universities in Qingdao. To achieve this goal, the research attempted:

1. To investigate the effects of work support (WS), family support (FS), psychological safety (PS) and professional identity (PI) on job burnout (JB) among private university administrators in Qingdao.

2. To assess the effects of work support (WS) and family support (FS) on psychological safety (PS) and professional identity (PI) among private university administrators in Qingdao.





3. To evaluate the mediating effect of psychological safety (PS) in the effects of work support (WS), family support (FS) and job burnout (JB) among private university administrators in Qingdao.

4. To evaluate the mediating effect of professional identity (PI) in the effects of work support (WS), family support (FS) and job burnout (JB) among private university administrators in Qingdao.

1.5 Research Questions

How to alleviate the job burnout of administrators in private universities in Qingdao is the main problem to be solved in this research. Accordingly, this research attempts to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What are the effects of work support (WS), family support (FS), psychological safety (PS) and professional identity (PI) on job burnout (JB) among private university administrators in Qingdao?

2. What are the effects of work support (WS) and family support (FS) on psychological safety (PS) and professional identity (PI) among private university administrators in Qingdao?





3. Does psychological safety (PS) mediate the relationship between work support (WS), family support (FS) and job burnout (JB) among private university administrators in Qingdao?

4. Does professional identity (PI) mediate the relationship between work support (WS), family support (FS) and job burnout (JB) among private university administrators in Qingdao?

1.6 Research Hypothesis

In order to achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions, the following research hypotheses depicted in Figure 1.3 are to be tested in this research:

H1: Work Support (WS) significantly and negatively affects Job Burnout (JB).

H2: Family Support (FS) significantly and negatively affects Job Burnout (JB).

H3: Psychological Safety (PS) significantly and negatively affects Job Burnout (JB).

H4: Professional Identity (PI) significantly and negatively affects Job Burnout (JB).

H5: Work Support (WS) significantly and positively affects Psychological Safety (PS).

H6: Family Support (FS) significantly and positively affects Psychological Safety (PS).

H7: Work Support (WS) significantly and positively affects Professional Identity (PI).

H8: Family Support (FS) significantly and positively affects Professional Identity (PI).

H9: Psychological Safety (PS) mediates the effect of Work Support (WS) on Job Burnout (JB).





H10: Psychological Safety (PS) mediates the effect of Family Support (FS) on Job Burnout (JB).

H11: Professional Identity (PI) mediates the effect of Work Support (WS) on Job Burnout (JB).

H12: Professional Identity (PI) mediates the effect of Family Support (FS) on Job Burnout (JB).

1.7 Conceptual Framework

To systematically explore the factors influencing job burnout among private university administrators, this research develops a conceptual framework that integrates external and internal factors. Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the framework provides a structured approach to examining the relationships among work support, family support, psychological safety, professional identity, and job burnout.

The JD-R model suggests that job resources, such as work support, can mitigate job burnout by reducing job demands and enhancing employee well-being (Demerouti et al., 2021). Although job requirements are not all negative, when job requirements require individuals to put in higher effort, it may bring individuals overworked states such as burnout and stress, and it is difficult for individuals to free themselves from





negative emotions (Bakker et al., 2000). Halbesleben pointed out that the JD-R model considers that when the resources owned by the individual are threatened or lost, the resources cannot meet the requirements of the work, or the resources paid are not rewarded accordingly, burnout is prone to occur (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

Similarly, the COR theory posits that individuals strive to acquire, retain, and protect valuable resources to cope with stress and burnout (Hobfoll, 2011). Work resources are physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects that help achieve work goals, reduce work requirements and the associated physical and psychological costs, or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development (Bakker et al., 2004). Therefore, work and family support are taken as work resources in this



research.

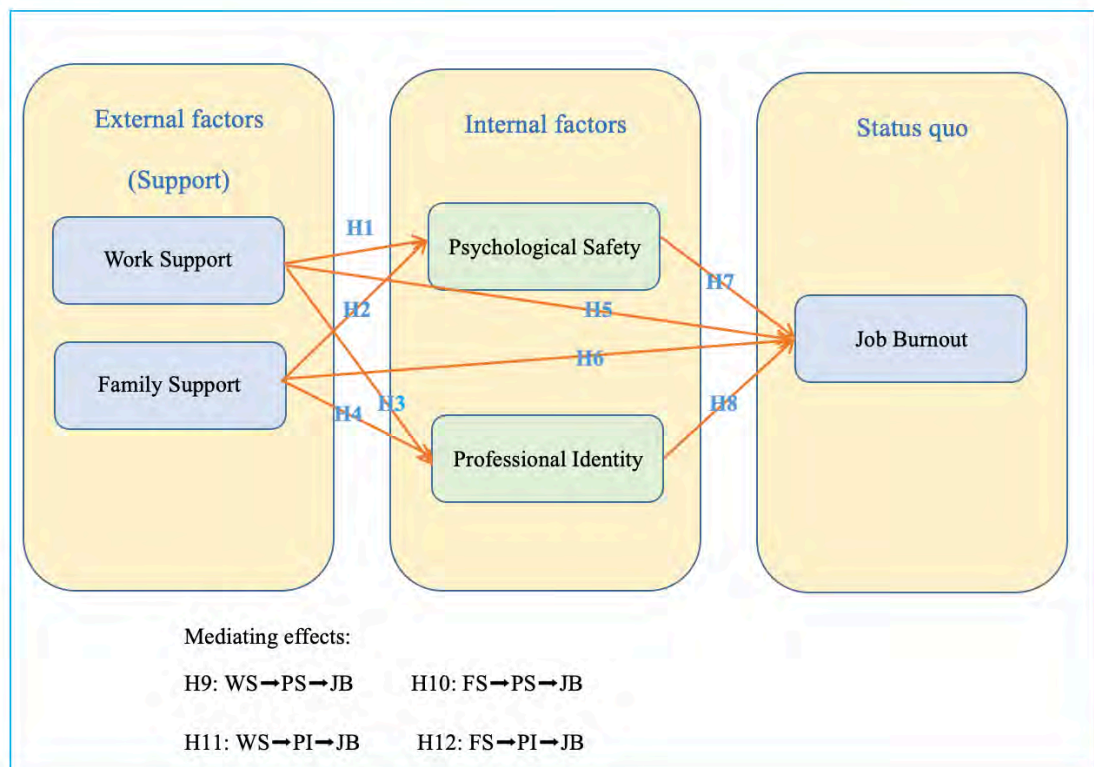
Building on these theories, this research examines how work and family support act as external resources, while psychological safety and professional identity function as internal resources influencing job burnout. This research hypothesized that work support (WS) and family support (FS) negatively influence job burnout (JB), as suggested by the JD-R model. Furthermore, psychological safety (PS) and professional identity (PI) were expected to mediate these relationships. Accordingly, this research posited that PS and PI mediate the relationship between WS FS and JB.



Therefore, this conceptual framework integrated external resources (work support and family support) and internal resources (psychological safety and professional identity) to elucidate their impact on job burnout. By extending the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory provided a comprehensive understanding of burnout of administrators in private university. This framework shown in Figure 1.3 establishes the theoretical foundation for hypotheses formulation and empirical analysis in the subsequent sections.

Figure 1.3

Conceptual Framework





1.8 Research Contributions

In reviewing the existing literature, it becomes evident that the theoretical foundation and empirical research on administrators in private universities have not been fully developed (Jiang et al., 2022). Therefore, this research expands upon and advances existing studies, contributing to the literature in several ways, as outlined below:

1.8.1 Theoretical Significance

This research integrates the JD-R Model and COR theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of job burnout among private university administrators, which aims to fill the theoretical gaps in the literature and previous empirical findings. The conceptual framework of this research was supported and justified by the JD-R Model and COR theory, incorporating the mediating role of psychological safety and professional identity.(Hobfoll, 2001).

By combining these frameworks, this research shows novel insights by demonstrating the combined impact of internal and external factors on burnout among private university administrators, an area underexplored in existing literature. The findings offer a more comprehensive model compared to previous research that only addressed internal or external factors in isolation. Notably, this research introduces the





mediating roles of PS and PI, which further enhance the understanding of burnout's complexity. This research contributes to both theoretical and practical insights, suggesting that increasing work support, family support an enhancing professional identity and psychological safety are key strategies for alleviating burnout and improving the well-being of university administrators.

Additionally, the research's robust methodology, including exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, confirms the reliability and validity of the constructs, ensuring the robustness of the findings. The research's comprehensive approach underscores the need for integrated intervention strategies that address both internal and external factors, offering valuable implications for future studies and practical applications in human resource management and organizational behavior.



1.8.2 Practical Significance

This research offers valuable insights into addressing job burnout among private university administrators, with practical implications for administrators, private university managers, and government authorities. The findings underscore the importance of both internal and external factors, such as work support, professional identity, and psychological safety, in mitigating burnout. By focusing on these factors, stakeholders in Qingdao and across China can adopt effective strategies to enhance





administrative well-being, engagement, and job satisfaction, contributing to the long-term success of private universities.

Practically, this research provides actionable recommendations for improving the work environment by fostering a supportive atmosphere, promoting psychological safety, and strengthening administrators' professional identities. Universities can utilize these strategies to not only reduce burnout but also enhance job performance and satisfaction among administrators. Additionally, the government can support these efforts by creating policies that encourage the integration of work-life balance, professional development, and mental health resources, further reinforcing the stability and sustainability of private higher education. This research also lays the groundwork for institutional management improvements, offering guidance to private universities in optimizing their administrative functions and ensuring sustainable growth in the sector.

1.9 Definition of Terms

The following section provides definitions of the key constructs examined in this research. Each construct is carefully defined based on relevant theoretical frameworks and empirical studies. These definitions establish a clear understanding of the variables under investigation and their significance in the context of job burnout among





administrators in private universities.

1.9.1 Administrators

In general, university administrators refer to staff responsible for managing institutional operations, supporting faculty, and ensuring the smooth functioning of academic and administrative affairs. In many private institutions, especially post-pandemic, staff reductions and financial constraints have led to an expanded scope of duties for administrators (Zhao, 2024). Unlike in public universities, where administrative and academic roles are more distinct, private universities often require administrators to assist with academic functions to compensate for faculty shortages (Bao, 2023).

In this research, the definition of university administrators includes those who also undertake teaching tasks due to structural changes in private universities. Furthermore, the private universities examined in this research refer specifically to undergraduate institutions.

As this research focuses on job burnout among administrators, it is essential to consider this dual role, as it fundamentally influences their experiences, challenges, and burnout risk within private undergraduate institutions.





1.9.2 Job Burnout

Maslach describes job burnout as a primarily state marked by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal achievement, particularly in roles with high emotional demands and professionals in service-oriented fields (Maslach, 1986). It is characterized by three main dimensions: emotional exhaustion, where individuals feel drained and lack energy for work; depersonalization, marked by negative attitudes and detachment from colleagues and work; and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, where individuals feel ineffective and unfulfilled in their work (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Pines, 1993). For university administrators, burnout arises from excessive workload and the stress of balancing administrative and teaching duties, leading to emotional fatigue and reduced professional satisfaction (Morris & Laipple, 2015; Ji & Yue, 2020). For university administrators, burnout arises from excessive workload and the stress of balancing administrative and teaching duties, leading to emotional exhaustion and reduced professional satisfaction (Morris & Laipple, 2015; Ji & Yue, 2020).





1.9.3 Work Support

Work support is a crucial resource in the organizational context, encompassing both emotional and instrumental assistance provided through positive interpersonal relationships at work (Moos, 1986). It includes support from both organizational managers (employee support) and colleagues (co-worker support), which helps employees cope with workplace challenges and enhances their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Work support is recognized as a key factor in reducing stress and burnout, promoting a positive work experience, and supporting employee career development (Jolly et al., 2021; Kossek et al., 2011). Through these supportive relationships, employees are better equipped to manage their workload and maintain psychological health (Hu & Shi, 2022). This research adopts Moos's definition of work support, emphasizing its role in fostering positive relationships and well-being within the workplace.

1.9.4 Family Support

Family support refers to the emotional, psychological, economic, and other forms of assistance provided by family members to help individuals manage life's challenges (Featherstone, 2003; Li, 2023). It includes not only emotional support, such as encouragement and empathy, but also practical support, such as financial aid and





caregiving (Li & Jiang, 2018; Li & Zhao, 2009). As a multidimensional construct, family support plays a critical role in maintaining work-life balance, alleviating work-related stress, and promoting individual well-being (Liu & Qi, 2019). Family support is particularly significant in helping individuals navigate the pressures of both work and non-work responsibilities, reducing burnout and enhancing job satisfaction (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Zeng, 2023). This research defines family support as the emotional, psychological, financial, and other forms of support provided by family members to individuals in their lives..

1.9.5 Professional Identity



Professional identity refers to an individual's self-conception and evaluation of their profession, encompassing both psychological and social roles (Meng et al., 2020). It is a dynamic and evolving process shaped by personal aspirations, workplace norms, and broader societal expectations (Tang, 2020; Li, 2010). Professional identity is not merely a reflection of acquired skills but is also an internalized belief system that governs behavior, ethical standards, and professional commitment (Liu, 2024; Tang, 2019). The formation of professional identity is influenced by formal education, professional training, and social experiences (Chen & Chen, 2023; Shen, 2023). In the context of university administrators, professional identity involves both a strong managerial identity and a solid teaching identity, which are shaped by the dual roles they occupy





(Song & Yang, 2023). This dual-role scenario presents unique challenges in the development of their professional identity.

1.9.6 Psychological Safety

Psychological safety refers to an individual's perception that their work environment allows for interpersonal risk-taking without fear of negative consequences such as embarrassment or retribution (Edmondson, 1999; Singh et al., 2018; Vévoda et al., 2016). It is characterized by a shared belief among team members that they can voice concerns, ask questions, or admit mistakes without facing punishment or harm to their career (Keim et al., 2014; Gao et al., 2022). This belief promotes an environment where individuals feel safe to challenge norms, make mistakes, and embrace change, ultimately enhancing engagement and team learning (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Leiter & Bakker, 2010; Labrague & De los Santos, 2020). In this research, psychological safety is specifically defined as the perception of university administrators that their work environment allows interpersonal risk-taking without fear of negative consequences (Fleming et al., 2023; Gilmartin et al., 2024).





1.10 Scope of the Research

By 2023, there were 22 private universities in Shandong Province, with Qingdao being home to six of them, making it the city with the highest number of private universities in the province. This research focuses on the administrators of private universities in Qingdao, not only because it has the largest number of such institutions, but also due to the city's status as an economically developed area with high competition pressure. Additionally, the concentration of universities in the city facilitates data collection, as all six private universities in Qingdao are ranked among the top 100 private universities in China. This research selected the administrators of private universities in Qingdao as the research object.



This research focuses on examining the direct impact of work support, family support on job burnout, also the indirect effects of psychological safety and professional identity on job burnout among administrators in private universities in Qingdao. The rationale for selecting administrators in private universities as the research context is as follows: Firstly, existing literature suggests a rising trend in job burnout among administrators. According to the literature, job burnout among administrators in the private university sector may be due to their dual tasks, lacking work support, family support, psychological safety and professional identity.





The population in this research consisted of 2986 administrators from six private universities in Qingdao. Using cluster sampling, a total of 350 questionnaires were distributed to administrators across six private universities in Qingdao based on the population. This research was cross-sectional in nature, allowing it to be completed within a short timeframe. Individuals served as the unit of analysis in this research, as this research aimed to examine the impact of work support, family support, psychological safety, and professional identity on job burnout among administrators in private universities in Qingdao.

1.11 Research Structure



The first chapter of this research introduces the background of job burnout as a prevalent and urgent issue that requires immediate attention, particularly within the education sector. It begins by analyzing the current state of job burnout among employees in the education industry, with a focus on the challenges faced by private universities. The chapter highlights the growing prominence of job burnout among university administrators, particularly those who undertake teaching tasks, due to the unique nature of their responsibilities. The chapter further discusses how the combined pressures of administrative duties and teaching loads lead to increased stress and burnout. In this context, the research objectives, questions, and hypotheses are clearly outlined, providing a foundation for the research. This chapter also addresses the





limitations of existing research and explains the theoretical framework used in this research, along with importance of this research lies in its contribution to the field by deepening the understanding of job burnout and its influencing factors among private university administrators

Chapter 2 delves into the existing literature on job burnout among university administrators, identifying gaps in the current research, especially in relation to private universities. It provides a comprehensive review of the literature, which reveals that while previous studies have addressed burnout in various sectors, few have specifically focused on the unique challenges faced by administrators in private universities. This chapter proposes a theoretical framework based on established models, such as Demerouti et al.'s Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to support this research. This framework supports the investigation into the role of external support (e.g., work and family support) and internal factors (e.g., psychological safety and professional identity) in mitigating burnout. Chapter 2 also outlines the development of the research's hypotheses and explains how this research aims to bridge the identified gaps in the existing literature.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in this research, confirming the quantitative approach as the primary research method. The chapter explains the data collection process, which involves a drop-off questionnaire survey distributed to a sample of private university administrators. A pilot test is conducted to obtain initial





data, followed by an analysis of the pilot test results to refine the survey instrument and ensure that the scales are valid and reliable for further analysis. This chapter also details the data analysis techniques employed, particularly the use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the research hypotheses.

Chapter 4 presents the research results, providing a detailed analysis of the 12 hypotheses tested in the research. The findings are organized and discussed, offering insights into the factors that contribute to job burnout among private university administrators. Finally, Chapter 5 interprets the research results, discusses their implications, and provides recommendations for addressing job burnout in the higher education sector. This chapter ends by highlighting the practical implications of the findings and proposing directions for future research to deepen the understanding of this crucial issue.

1.12 Summary of Chapter

Burnout is a pervasive issue affecting employees across various industries, with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment being its core symptoms. Although these symptoms are not exclusive to academia, the impact of burnout has become particularly pronounced in the education sector, especially since the onset of the pandemic. This phenomenon has not only





affected faculty members but has also become a critical issue for university administrators. In the context of private universities, administrative burnout has emerged as a unique and pressing challenge. While private and public universities share some common traits, the factors contributing to burnout in private university administrators are distinct and require a nuanced understanding. This research aims to explore these factors, with a particular focus on administrators who are also tasked with teaching responsibilities and underscore the critical importance of this issue.

Existing research highlights that the challenges faced by private universities have intensified post-pandemic, including increased financial pressures, competition, and faculty shortages, forcing administrators to take on additional teaching duties. The combination of heavy workloads, low salaries, job insecurity, and unclear professional identity has led to rising stress levels, contributing to burnout. This burnout undermines administrators' well-being and hampers university management and growth. This research underscores the urgency of understanding and mitigating burnout in these environments.

This research aims to fill gaps in the existing literature, especially regarding burnout among private university administrators. By critically examining the unique challenges faced by these administrators, this research will provide a comprehensive analysis of how various stressors converge to cause burnout. Furthermore, this research will offer a detailed exploration of the systemic factors at play, such as institutional





policies, organizational structures, and the broader educational environment, that contribute to burnout in these settings. The subsequent chapter will review the relevant literature on burnout in university administrators, highlighting the existing gaps and positioning this research to contribute new insights into the specific context of private universities. By bridging these gaps, this research not only enhances our understanding of burnout in this particular setting but also lays the groundwork for developing targeted interventions that address the root causes of burnout, ensuring better management and sustainability within private universities.

